

VARIOUS *11. F. f*
TRACTS

BY

f The Rev^d. JAMES PENN, A. B. *K*

UNDER-GRAMMAR-MASTER

O F

CHRIST'S HOSPITAL,

A N D

LECTURER of the united Parishes of ST. ANN
and AGNES, and ST. JOHN ZACHARY,
ALDERSGATE.

Libertas debet retineri.



L O N D O N :

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For the AUTHOR.

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TO THE
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YOUR Encouragement of the Work is gratefully acknowledged, and should it in any Respect merit your Approbation, it will be a peculiar Satisfaction. To write with Freedom, yet with Moderation, and to expose absurd Tenets, yet without severe Reflections upon their Authors, hath been the Endeavour of,

GENTLEMEN,

*Christ-Hospital,
April 9, 1762.*

Your most obliged and
humble Servant,

JAMES PENN.

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REIGN OF CHARLES THE FIRST

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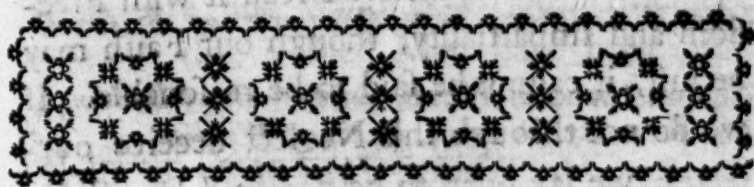
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T H E
READING OF THE SCRIPTURE
WITH FREEDOM,
AND
JUDGING FOR OURSELVES.

HE Scripture is useful, because it contains an Account of our Redemption, our Duty, and our future State. It is necessary to read it with Care and Diligence, to be assured that our Faith and Hope are rightly and justly founded. It is requisite, lest we should be deceived, to examine its Contents, and to see, if the Evidence alledged in support of its Authority is divine. An implicit Assent to its Doctrines is not commendable. Though the Benefits arising from the Belief of the Truth of Christianity powerfully recommend it to our Esteem, it ought not to be received without a proper and strict Inquiry
B into

into its Merits. Unless we read it with Freedom and Impartiality, though our Faith may be just, it cannot be said to be reasonable. If we do not through this Neglect deceive ourselves, we lay open to be deceived by others. Indolence and Inattention are of great Advantage to the wicked and the designing; they propagate Error with Success, when Men give up their Understanding, and are content to believe, as they are taught, not considering whether it is right so to believe, or whether what they believe is right.

We are told that Christ hath offered a full and perfect Satisfaction for the Sins of Mankind: But how are we to be certain of this? How do we know that he had the Ability for such an Undertaking, or sufficient Authority to execute it? Can these Things in any just and proper Manner be known without reading the Book, wherein his Credentials to a divine Commission are shewn, and his Pretensions to the illustrious Character of the Saviour confirmed? We are not to build our Hope of Salvation on what others report of it, no more than we are to learn our Duty from what others practice. The Writings of the Learned are not to determine our Judgment, nor the Examples of the Good our Conduct; as Men, both are frail and fallible.

There

There are not wanting various Instances to prove, that learned Men have been mistaken, and good Men have done wrong, in Matters of Concern and Importance. Tho' it is prudent not to rely too much upon our own Understanding, it is weak entirely to enslave it to another's.

The Absurdities and Impositions that have been, were originally owing to, have principally prevailed, and subsisted through this Weakness. Men will be misled, who implicitly embrace, observe, and adhere to the Dictates of others. If the sacred Books were not in our Power, there would be a Necessity for blindly and precipitately following of Guides: But as we have the free Use of them, and they are written in a Language understood by us, and in a Style levelled to every Capacity, a partial Obedience is criminal. In Matters of Fact we are frequently obliged to depend upon the Testimony of others; but in moral and speculative Subjects every one may think and judge for himself.

Religion is the particular Concern of every Man, because every Man is to answer for himself, and to be rewarded, or punished, according to what his Actions have been, good, or bad. Doth it not therefore belong to every Man to consult it for himself? If he doth not,

7 : THE READING OF THE SCRIPTURE, &c.

how can he be satisfied that he hath performed the Conditions of his Acceptance with God? To have an Assurance of it, he must examine his Conscience by the Scriptures. In those, and none other Writings, is he to look for the Method of his Salvation; for in them alone it is to be found.

The same Care and Diligence are necessary to be used in spiritual, as in temporal Affairs. Men are soon sensible of trusting too much to others, and neglecting to look into Things themselves: Their Estates grow worse, their Substance decays, and in the End they are impoverished, if not ruined. Who but themselves are to blame for these unhappy Consequences? When Masters are indolent and negligent, Servants will naturally become careless and fraudulent. To prevent Men therefore from being imposed upon, or deceived, in that grand Affair *their future Salvation*, they must not give Heed to the Doctrines of Men, but have Recourse to the Commandments of God.

The Word of God is true. The End proposed by it is our everlasting Happiness; therefore it cannot deceive us by Falsehoods, nor amuse us with imaginary Hopes. Men's Interpretation of it is frequently partial, prejudiced, self-interested. Hence comes that
Variety

Variety of Opinions espoused, contradictory to one another, and all in some Degree repugnant to sacred Writ : Yet are they supported and maintained by their several Advocates, and Scripture, which condemns the Absurdities, is quoted in their Vindication. How fit is it then to read the Scripture ourselves, that our Faith and Practice may not be founded on human, but divine Prescriptions.

The plain and simple Doctrines of Christianity seem to be these, *That Christ hath offered a proper Atonement for the Sins of Mankind—that Repentance from Sin and Amendment of Life are necessary to entitle us to the Benefit of that Atonement—and that future Obedience through that Atonement will procure for us eternal Life.*

There is nothing mysterious in these Truths ; for they are Subjects not above our Comprehension. The Mind may freely give its Assent to them, as being both useful and reasonable ; but *Predestination, Election*, and the like mysteries, founded on, not founded in the Scriptures, cannot be admitted without offering an Injury to human Reason, and doing a Violence to human Nature : Yet they are thought to be necessary Articles of Faith, and as such are received. It is therefore

highly expedient for us to read the Scriptures, that we might know what, and how much we are to believe.

Doctrines and Practices allowed and observed in any Church, though they may plead Antiquity for their Establishment, ought to be considered as indifferent, not obligatory upon Conscience, unless they are clearly revealed. The high Opinion entertained of the Abilities of ancient Christian Writers hath been of great Prejudice to Christianity, and not a little promoted and served the Cause of Deism. Their Tenets have been so much revered, that Men have claimed to themselves a Merit from being well versed in them. Of so great Value accounted, that they have been more quoted, commented on, and studied, than the Scriptures. Their Writings have been made the Test of Orthodoxy, and the Criterion of true Religion.

A Deference ought to be shewn to the Writings of the Good, the Pious, and the Learned; but their Judgment should not be deemed infallible, nor admitted as absolutely decisive. Their warmest Advocates cannot exempt them from Weakness and Imperfection. Their great Abuse of Time in curiously exploring into Mysteries, and the much greater Abuse of it in attempting to explain
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their Nature, have served to none other Purpose, than the destroying Christian Charity and brotherly Love, enslaving human Liberty, and depriving Mankind of their natural Freedom of thinking and acting for themselves. Every one hath an undoubted Right to think as he pleases concerning Religion; but he hath no Right to obtrude his Sentiments upon others. No Man ought to be subject to ecclesiastical Penalties, or a Deprivation of civil Rights and Privileges, if he doth not choose to adopt them, much less the Object of Excommunication, least of all Damnation.

Suppose others to be in the right, and he in the wrong, is he guilty of Sin, because he differs from them? He may practice agreeable to his Profession, and his Tenets may not proceed from Prejudice and Obstinacy, but be the Result of free and candid Inquiry. His Conduct therefore is deserving of Commendation; if he acted otherwise, he might be justly censured.

Our Faith in relation to certain Articles will not, it is presumed, however warmly insisted upon, make Part of the judicial Process hereafter. It will not be asked, whether we have believed right, but whether we acted agreeable to what we believed to have been right.

He certainly acts the most consistent with the Character of a reasonable Being, who judges for his own Conscience, and resigns it not up to the arbitrary Determination or Regulation of others: Such a one, who consults the Scriptures for that Purpose, will probably embrace, and fall into fewer Errors, than he that is taught.

Is it not requisite to assist and inform the ignorant, that the necessary Articles of Faith should be pointed out? Undoubtedly. But then they should be strictly confined to such, should be clearly and plainly revealed, and delivered in the Language of Scripture, without Comment, or Paraphrase. The Articles of Faith absolutely necessary are very few, and such as all Christians, of whatever Sect or Denomination, will readily consent to, and acknowledge. What those Articles are, hath been mentioned.

Are those the only Articles required to be believed, both by the ignorant and the understanding Christian? If they are, why these Divisions, why these Contentions amongst us? Why doth Deism so much prevail? Dissention and Infidelity spring from the same Causes, from hard and grievous Impositions upon the Conscience and Sense of Mankind, the making Things indifferent obligatory,
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and Things inconceivable necessary. But how doth this appear? It will be illustrated by Instances. Let the Reader judge and determine with Candour. The Scriptures are before him, and to them he is referred for the Truth and Authority of what is advanced.

How can I receive the Doctrine of Predestination as a necessary Article of Faith? What is my Happiness or Misery fixed, even before I was born? Wherefore then came I into the World? How is my Creation consistent with the Goodness of the Creator? Would it not have been better for me never to have had Existence, than to have been made with a certain Intention of being miserable? Of what Use is the Freedom I am possessed with? Can that prevent the predetermined Purpose of Heaven? Who can alter or reverse its Decrees? What Concern therefore should it be to me, whether I live well or ill, since my Fate hereafter hath been previously settled, and nothing done by me can prevent it?

We cannot think, nor conceive so wickedly of God, whose Glory is principally manifested in shewing Mercy, and whose Power cannot be exerted in making any, even the most inconsiderable Being wretched, that he hath predestinated any Man to suffer eternal Misery. This God could not do. What Pleasure

sure could there have been in forming a Creature, that could neither oppose, nor resist his Will, merely to afflict and torment it? For what Purpose did Christ die, or why are Men exhorted to repent, if they are predestinated to Damnation? Those who are predestinated to Salvation, want no Saviour, and need no Repentance; but the wicked stand in need of both. If then we admit the Doctrine of Predestination to be true, the Sacrifice of Christ was unnecessary, and Repentance is useless: For those, namely Sinners, cannot enjoy the Benefit of either, for whose Benefit both were intended.

Why should good Men persevere in the Practice of their Duty, which often subjects them to Inconveniences, and lays them open to Disadvantages: Why should Men abstain from base and criminal Pleasures: Why should the wicked be called upon to amend the Error of his Ways, or the righteous exhorted to continue walking in the Commandments of God blameless, if their future Condition is unalterably fixed? Far be it from Man to speak thus unworthily, as well as absurdly, of the supreme Being. He is desirous that all should partake of the Blessings of the Gospel of Peace; is unwilling that any should perish; is pleased with the Conversion, not the
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the Death of a Sinner, and offers to all the glorious Inheritance of everlasting Life.

Is it not on those Accounts, that so many and gracious are the Invitations and Exhortations in the Scripture to Sinners to repent ; such Comfort, Consolation, and Hope administered, that even the most profligate and abandoned need not be driven to despair of Pardon and Acceptance with God, if he is honest in his Intention, and will endeavour with the Assistance of divine Grace to correct the Errors and Follies of his past Life ? What need of these Invitations and Exhortations, if his Misery is preordained ? To lead Men up with the Hopes of Happiness, even to assure them of it, if they are good, or sincere Penitents, and then to deceive them, is an Act of Cruelty not to be supposed of a Being, who is represented as abounding with Love and Goodness for Man.

Original Sin is also a deep and intricate Subject : The human Understanding cannot comprehend it : In a Matter therefore so abstruse, it tho' may be curious to explore, it is Presumption to determine positively concerning it. That human Nature is corrupted, and hath a strong Propensity to Evil, are acknowledged Truths ; but whether we bring that Corruption with us into the World, or the Propensity is stronger

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to Evil than Good, doth not appear so obvious : Because the former reflects upon the Goodness of God, who made us so, and the latter strikes at human Liberty, as it doth not leave to Man an equal Power of choosing or refusing *.

Will the Almighty be offended at the Wickedness of Man, or can Man be obnoxious to the divine Resentment, for doing what he could not avoid doing ? Did God make Man corrupt merely to manifest his Power in saving him from the Consequence of that Corruption ? Better for Man never to have had Existence, if such was to have been the Condition of it : But God hath made no Man wretched ; he is the unhappy Author of his own Misery.

We come into the World out of the Hands of our Creator pure from Sin, and free from Corruption, with certain little Rays of Divinity. In our Infancy and Youth the Eyes see more than the Understanding, and the Senses are more strong and acute than Reason. We

* The Descendants of *Adam*, like to him, are not born with a stronger Propensity to Vice than Virtue. If otherwise, it would not have been possible for him to have preserved his Innocence, nor for them to have resisted Sin. However blameable and criminal their Conduct in that Respect might be, neither could have been the Object of divine Wrath and Punishment, but of divine Pity and Favour. The Inducements to transgress are the same in both, " The Prospect of Pleasure, and some unknown Good."

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are first corrupted through the Influence of bad Example, and we commit Folly, under an Opinion of Good, through the Violence of Passion, and the Want of Reflection. By these Means Vice insinuates itself, and bad Practices increase upon us; by which the divine Rays are obscured, not extinguished: For no Man can be absolutely wicked, no more than he can be absolutely holy.

Our Corruption therefore seems to be not before, nor at, but after our Birth. God is not the Author of it, but ourselves. Would it not be impious to charge him with our Follies? Yet how could he be excused, if we had been thus created? How could we, being Evil, do Good? A corrupt Tree brings forth corrupt Fruit. According to the Seed sown is the Body. Who expects to gather Grapes from Thorns, or Figs from Thistles? Neither could God look for Obedience from Man, when he had not given him the Power necessary to perform it: But God hath given to him the Power, and therefore he expects his Obedience. When we commit Sin, it is not owing to an original Corruption; every one is drawn away and enticed by his own particular Lusts.

Subjects purely speculative should be left free. If some are so bold as to determine,
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who hath a Right so to do, in Matters, of whose Nature, it is generally allowed, no one can have any Intuition, Perception, or Knowledge? Who then will presume to say positively, what a Man is, or is not to believe? To attempt an Explanation of these Things, or to make Men understand them, is equally ridiculous, as to bid the Blind to see, or the Deaf to hear.

How necessary is it therefore to read the Scripture, that we might with Certainty know what we should believe, and might not be loaded with Articles, which, if not altogether useless, are indifferent, and will not make us either the wiser, or the better. Our Time will be more properly employed in learning our Duty, than in exercising a vain Curiosity after Mysteries. Bad Actions are worse than erroneous Opinions: The latter flow from a weak and mistaken Judgment, the former proceed from a wicked and corrupt Heart: The one will be forgiven, the other, without Repentance, never.

Protestants would be more easily united, and Deists would have less Enmity against Christianity, if there was no Compulsion used to subscribe Articles of Faith, which they cannot understand, nor comprehend, and which those who demand Subscription cannot explain

plain to them, nor afford sufficient Arguments to recommend the Subscription as reasonable. Articles of Faith should be few in Number, and such as are apparently and absolutely necessary, so that to refuse Assent to them would be absurd.

Scripture is an Authority, which all Christians will submit to with Pleasure, and every candid Inquirer after Truth attend to. The End of Scripture is Man's Happiness; it cannot therefore have any Design to deceive, or impose upon him, nor will it require his Assent to Things superfluous, or unworthy of his Belief. Private or publick Interpretations of it may be wrong, more frequently take their Rise from a Love of Wealth, and the Acquisition of Power, than the Principle of doing Good to Mankind; and the Authority they acquire generally proceeds from Compulsion, Fear, or Interest.

When the Clergy had laid aside their Primitive Humility and Simplicity, and Pride, Avarice, and Ambition had seized them; they, to gratify those Vices, neglected the Duty of their Function. The forsaking their Station to attend the Courts of Princes, and to solicit the Interest of the Great, brought on Disorders in the Government of the Church, and gave Birth to various Heresies. These soon acquired
Strength,

Strength, and became formidable through Neglect and Inattention. The Remedy applied to the Evil was severe, and melancholly to reflect upon. Instead of having recourse only to Reason and Scripture for their Confutation, the Clergy, having acquired an Influence with the civil Magistrate, and Christianity becoming national, got a Power delegated to them of framing Creeds, Articles of Faith, Canons, and mysterious Explanations of Mysteries. These all, who would live at Ease and unmolested, and enjoy their Rights and Privileges, were to receive, without enquiring how these Things were so. Hereticks, as they were called, and the Orthodox, as they stiled themselves, were equally culpable in this Respect, both assuming this unjust and unreasonable Authority, according to the Power which they had acquired from the reigning Emperor.

The same Ecclesiastical Tyranny, odious and detestable as it is, hath been continued. Is human Liberty less enslaved, or human Reason less confined? Are not Popery and Protestantism alike destructive of free Inquiry? If not, why should a Man be subject to Excommunication for censuring, or examining into the Reasonableness of the Church's Determinations?

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It must shock every generous and humane Person, when he looks back upon the Miseries, which Men have suffered in the several Ages of the Christian Church, when in Power, for a mere Difference of Opinion. The Degradations, Fines, Imprisonment, Banishment, Persecution, Tortures, even Death, which they endured for asserting the Liberty of human Nature, *of judging for themselves*; and maintaining the Privilege, which Christianity hath given them, *of proving all Things, and holding fast that which appeared to them to be good*. The Severities mentioned, though countenanced and executed by the Civil Power, no Arguments whatever can justify, palliate, or excuse: Neither can Ecclesiasticks be justified in the Eye of unprejudiced Reason, nor pure Religion, who shall, under any civil or religious Penalty, oblige Men to approve of any Articles of Faith; because their Faith may be right, and their Morals pure without them.

Freedom of thinking is the Key to useful Knowledge: Without it Truth is not to be discovered, nor Error detected. In Matters of Importance, such as those are which concern his Salvation, every Man, who hath the Ability, should think freely. Bigoted to no System, and entertaining no popular Prejudices, he should read the Scriptures with

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Freedom,

Freedom, and determine concerning them with Candor. Void of Superstition, he should not easily admit Things to be true, which operate with his Fears, and an Enemy to Libertinism, he should not be bold to reject as false, what limits his Desires. He that acts thus, will neither deceive, nor be deceived.

An Exertion of this laudable Spirit is always necessary: There is none other Way of avoiding Imposition: Confident and presumptuous Men have in all Ages abounded. Would Popery have continued so many Centuries, if implicit Obedience to her Doctrines had not been recommended as a Precept of Religion? What serves to keep up and support the Division amongst Protestants? What? A mean and servile Adherence and Conformity to the general Tenets espoused by the various Sects. A Conduct unworthy and unbecoming of a reasonable Being, who must be sensible of his own Imperfections, that in many Things he is mistaken, and his Knowledge much confined. One Man may be more learned than another; but is he more infallible? Learning hath been of singular Use in the Discovery of many Truths, and it hath also led Men into very gross Errors. The Pride and Vanity of the learned are as common, as the Affectation and Presumption of the ignorant: Both have their Singularities

Singularities and Absurdities. It is therefore prudent not to trust to any Man in Things of Moment: Such Matters respecting our Faith and Manners must be allowed. We have the Scriptures before us, let us read them. From them we are to regulate our Conscience, and learn right and wrong: The Doctrines they deliver we are to believe, the Duties they prescribe we are to practice. What others recommend and assert so to be, we are no further concerned to believe and practice, than as they shall appear, upon a strict Inquiry, to be clearly revealed in the Scriptures.

Free Inquiry would soon put an End to Divisions, which Zealots and Bigots, who have an Interest in them, support. Inattention produces Error, and Ignorance renders the Propagation of it successful: Credulity is an Encouragement to Innovators to spread their Opinions with Confidence and Safety. The weak and wicked would be disappointed in their Schemes, if Men made use of their Right to think and judge for themselves: But now, notwithstanding the various Opinions espoused, their Inconsistency with each other, and their apparent Repugnancy to sacred Truths, there is no Difficulty to procure a favourable and extensive Reception. Innovators will never fail, nor will Profelytes without

Number be wanting, when we consider the Ignorance of many who cannot make an Inquiry, and the Weakness of others, who will not; the Man of Business, who pretends to have no Leisure for it, and the Man of Pleasure, who judges it to be a painful and disagreeable Task; the repenting Sinner, who lends a willing Ear to every Thing that seemingly allays the Terrors of Guilt, and the Superstitious, who are led away with any Thing delivered with Solemnity and Devotion, and recommended under the venerable and much abused Name of Religion.

Attached to no Sect or Party, dare to examine Things yourself: Trust to none other Authority but the Scriptures: Receive not Assertions without Proofs, nor admit Arguments as decisive without examining them by Reason, and comparing them with the Scriptures. What an amazing Stupidity is it to commit your Salvation to the Disposal of any one? Would the Man be judged prudent and discreet, who should entirely permit the managing and settling his Accounts to another? Would not such Neglect lay him open to Frauds, and in the End destroy his Credit? If he falls into the same Imprudence and Indiscretion in Spirituals, will he not also be liable to Deception and Imposition? It is his
Duty

Duty to read for himself, and he hath nothing to obstruct him : For the Scriptures are plain, and contain nothing but Truth. In human Writings there is a Mixture of Truth and Error ; they cannot be perfect, for their Authors are not : They cannot therefore claim an absolute Dependance. Instead of rightly informing others, they may want correcting themselves ; and instead of teaching others, may yet be to learn their Duty, or may not be more wise than their Disciples.

To read the Scriptures with Freedom, and not wholly rely upon human Authority, is further necessary, that we might know Things truly. Let me instance in the grand Division, that hath so long subsisted amongst Protestants, concerning the Use of certain Forms, Rites, and Ceremonies. How are we to judge of this Controversy ? By the Writings of the different Parties ? They are both infallible. By the Treatment they shew to each other ? They have not much Candor, and as little of Charity. By the Manner of managing the Dispute ? They will allow of none to write with Freedom but themselves. By the Stile ? Less of Virulence and Reproach would be better. By the Scriptures ? It is an Authority, which they both plead, but are unwilling to be determined by it.

However we ought to be determined by it, that we may think and practice rightly in this Matter. What say they? Nothing more than this, *Let things be done decently, and in order.* Is not the Manner of Worship in the established Church according to this Rule? If some Things were omitted, it would not be less so. If they are allowed to be indifferent, should they be maintained at the Expence of such a Separation? Are they not innocent? It cannot be denied. But some, who are as pious and good as ourselves, think otherwise. If then they are indifferent, may they not be as innocently given up, as retained? They cannot certainly be wholly in the wrong, and we in the right. This, though a foolish Conceit, is a prevailing Mistake.

Hath not the Church a Power of instituting Rites and Ceremonies? It must be granted: But there may not be the same Reason for continuing, as making them. Her Institutions are not to be supposed perfect, without any Defect, incapable of Improvement, and not admitting of any Alteration. A Change of Times and Circumstances may make a Revival, Alteration, or even an Abolition of some Things necessary. Human Affairs are in so fluctuating and inconstant a State, that civil Society is not to be governed by any certain

tain and determinate Laws. Incidents will occur to render some useless, and to frame new ones. The Government of the Church, no more than that of the State, is not to be directed by absolute and unalterable Laws.

Instances prove the Truth of this Observation. Why else these Divisions? The Ecclesiastical Laws made, and the Mode of Worship established at the Reformation, were proper and just. The agreeing with Popery in Matters indifferent, and deviating from it, where its Principles and Practices were apparently false and unjust, was a Mark of Wisdom and Prudence in the Reformers. For as the Abuses and Corruptions of the Church of *Rome* had been of long standing, and Custom, Education, and national Religion had raised strong Prejudices in their Favour, Men would not at that Time have been easily brought over to have renounced them, if not only Things exceptionable, but Things allowed to be innocent, had been laid aside. Their Affections were to be drawn off by Degrees: For what they and their Ancestors had for many Ages received and admired, made a deep Impression upon their Mind. This Opinion probably induced the Reformers to retain such Rites and Ceremonies of the *Romish* Church, as were inoffensive and decent.

cent. Not to have retained such, would have made the Reformation to have appeared as calculated for private and political Views, not for the spiritual Good and Happiness of the People; and undoubtedly it would not have been so successful, nor its Progress have been so rapid.

But as now there is no Danger of our returning back again to Popery, and we have too high a Sense of the Liberty we enjoy, ever to suffer our Reason to be duped, and our Conscience enslaved again, the Institutions before innocent, if now become exceptionable, should be disused; because the End of their Appointment hath been answered; in having brought over those to the Protestant Communion, who might otherwise have continued in the *Romish* Perswasion.

To occasion a Schism in the Church of Christ is certainly criminal: But whom are we to look upon as the Authors? Who are the Aggressors? Who hath the best Claim to the Title of the Church of Christ? Both Parties endeavour to exculpate themselves, and they are to be commended for it; but not for reflecting upon each other: In this they are to be blamed. May not both be innocently in the wrong; and neither he that conforms, nor he that dissents, be guilty of Sin? Our Manner of
Worship,

Worship, if not contrary to, is not to be found in the New Testament : It was copied from the Practices of that impure Christian Church, the Church of *Rome*. Though they may be greatly purged from their Abuses, there seems to be too near a Resemblance in the Use of some Things to their original Superstition, which on that Account are offensive to them.

In many Things we shall find the Arguments for retaining or rejecting Rites and Ceremonies to be of equal Force and Weight, and to have the Approbation and Confirmation of the Scriptures. As Men they, as well as we, have an unquestionable Right to judge for themselves, and to dispose of their own Conscience : and Christianity supports this Right, by giving to them such a Power. *Hast thou Faith? Have it to thyself before God.* If their Opinions are false, as Ignorance may be the Cause, and Conscience the Motive for embracing them, they are excusable, being guilty of no Sin : For where no Knowledge is, there can be no Sin. According to *St. James*, *To him only that knoweth to do good, and doth it not, to him it is a Sin* : And according to *St. Paul*, he who conforms to, believes in, or practices any Thing, though in itself indifferent, and of no Obligation, which he judges to be wrong, or is in his own Mind

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so perswaded, commits a Sin, *Whatever is not of Faith, faith he, is Sin.* Let us not then judge our Brother's Conscience, but take care rightly to inform our own; not expecting that he should comply with us, in doing what he should not do, and what, both in Reason and Scripture, he would be condemned for doing.

The whole of the Controversy rests here, that the Things prescribed are innocent, and therefore may be complied with; that they are also indifferent, and therefore may not be complied with *. He then that censures another in this Matter, condemns himself: The Censure recoiling back upon the Censor. The Liberty both have assumed is justified in Reason, and not disallowed by Religion. Good Nature and mutual Condescension would tend

* Two Instances may suffice to evince it. The Church, as a Token of Humility, and a Sense of the Communicant's Unworthiness to partake of so great a Blessing commemorated in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, communicates Kneeling. The Dissenters, thinking it to be the nearest to the Original Form, and lest they should seem to pay, as the Papists do, divine Adoration to the consecrated Bread and Wine, receive sitting.

The Church in Baptism uses the Sign of the Cross to signify, that notwithstanding the various Temptations, Troubles, and Misfortunes we are exposed to, we should remember our Faith, and Promise of Obedience, and persist in our Integrity unto our Live's End. The Dissenters omit it, because divine Adoration is offered to it by the Papists.

An indifferent Person can hardly forbear smiling, to find that such Trifles should serve to keep up the Separation: yet lament that they should be upheld and maintained at the Expence of Christian Love and Unity.

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greatly to an Accommodation and Reconciliation: But whilst each Party vindicates and justifies itself at the others Expence, Obstinacy must ensue; the Expectation of an Union is vain; Attempts towards it will be fruitlessly made, and only display the Folly and Weakness of those who make them.

Whether the Things are complied with or not, we are to love as Brethren. If Rites and Ceremonies are or are not prescribed us in the Scriptures, Charity certainly is. The Man of Candour will always judge, though it may not be true of all, he will not suspect it otherwise of any, that Protestants, whether within or without the Church, are actuated by Conscience, and are of this or that Profession, as thinking it to be the best Mode of Worship, and the best Way of serving God; the promoting his Glory, and their own Salvation.

What Protestant is there, very few if any, that hath not imbibed his first Principles at the Mother's Breast, and is not of this or that Sect, because his Ancestors, his Parents, his Guardians were so, or it is the Religion of the Place of his Nativity? All are to be pitied, none are to be hastily condemned: They are not in Fault, nor are their Teachers to blame, provided that they instruct them only
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in such Things, as they firmly believe to be right. Who then will accuse his Christian Brother? Let him look to himself. Is he not in the same Situation? Have not his Profession and Belief been taught, and instilled into him? Who can deny it? How then will he excuse his Want of Charity to another? If Men will keep their Mind open for Conviction, will listen to the Voice of Truth, wherever they hear it, and embrace it, whenever they find it, however disagreeable and contradictory to their Prejudices, their Conduct is so far from being culpable and blameable, that it is highly commendable and just. To act upon any other Principles is Bigotry; neither shews the honest Man, nor the sincere Christian.

The Christian is to hate no Man, but to do good to all, especially to those of the Household of Faith. As we are Christians, having the same Hopes, Heirs of the same Promises, and equally entitled to the Benefits of Christ's Redemption, we ought to be kindly affectioned one to another. As Protestants, of whatever Denomination, let us not expose, but pity each others Infirmities; knowing this, that there is no Sect without its particular Defects and Failings; remembering also, that private Opinions are not to lessen our Charity, which is a Duty of universal Obligation.

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We should, without having a partial Regard for the particular Sect to which we may belong, as we are Men, labour to advance the temporal Interest of each other ; as Christians, to promote the spiritual Good ; as fellow Citizens, to permit to others, without upbraiding, the Liberty, which we assume, *of judging for themselves*. Let the Man of Probity, Integrity, and Virtue be caressed, esteemed, and honoured by us, whatever he may be, where-ever he may be found, of whatever Sect, Nation, or Religion. If he worships God in Sincerity and Truth, with an honest and upright Heart, though he may be wrong in the Mode of Worship, or even mistaken in its proper Object, he is deserving of our Friendship. However, every Man is entitled to our Charity, if not to our Confidence. If we are any one's Enemy, let us so be to those, who are Enemies to Virtue and Goodness *.

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* Brotherly Love and Charity are warmly recommended by the Precepts, and strongly enforced by the Example of our Saviour. Persons, of whatever Sect and Persuasion, who do not center the whole of Religion in the Observance of received Forms, or private or publick Opinions founded on it, but rather in the Practice of its Laws, merit our Esteem, and are entitled to Respect. We should treat each other with Candour and Moderation, not censuring, reviling, and persecuting on Account of a Difference in Sentiments, but behaving with Kindness, Civility, and good Nature. This may dispose them to an Union ; which, if Report says true, some of the Presbyterians,

What hath been offered, may be an Inducement to Men to read the Scriptures for themselves, in order rightly to inform themselves, and to have Charity one for another. The Division subsisting amongst Protestants, every Lover of Peace, every sincere Friend of Religion, every Well-wisher to the Safety and Prosperity of his Country must be desirous of having closed. The Method proposed may probably effect it: It will however be productive of this good, *the putting an End to that Rancour, Hatred, and Animosity, which both Parties have entertained and expressed against each other, to the no little Disturbance of the publick Tranquility, the great Detriment of Individuals, and the Disgrace of the Christian Profession.*

Permit me, with Freedom and Plainness of Speech, to point out and recommend Truths necessary to be known, believed, and observ-

rians, and not a few, are well inclined to: and from the Conversation had at different Times with several of them, there is Reason for believing, that an Accommodation might be effected, if we were to soften the Terms of Communion. That they would insist upon too much, and be satisfied with nothing short of an intire Change and Alteration in our Church Discipline, are malicious Assertions, and big with Falsehood. They are not so rigid, nor so tenacious of their Customs, as their Forefathers. They are not as heretofore ashamed of being seen in a Church, and conversing with its Members. This shews a Disposition to Conformity. Let it be encouraged. Before we condemn their Proposals, let us first hear them, and make the Experiment, before we say that they are not fit to be trusted.

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ed. Other Matters respect private Opinion, these demand publick Assent. Whatever we may Think of other Things, we must admit these to be true, if we have any Hope in the Promises of God, made to us through the Satisfaction offered by Christ.

Let us not search into Mysteries *, for we have not a Capacity sufficient for it: And they are Subjects not proper for human Enquiry and Disquisition. The Obscurity in which they are delivered, and the Variety of Opinions entertained concerning them, equally plausible, equally uncertain, shew that they do not belong to us. Our Salvation doth not depend upon a Belief of these Things, nor is the

* It will be readily granted, that Things not the Objects of our Senses, concerning which Imagination can only give a confused Notion, do not belong to us. Our Knowledge is derived from the Senses; we cannot think without the Use of them. The human Mind may form Conceptions seemingly independent of the Senses, but they were certainly the original Cause; and those Conceptions can neither be explained to others, nor understood by ourselves, if the Senses are not employed as the Instruments.

This gave Occasion to those Descriptions and Representations of the Deity in Scripture, of his having Passions and Members. This was the Language in which he made himself known to us, as being best understood by us; for we cannot think, nor speak of the Deity, otherwise than of ourselves, as having Members and Passions. Revelation hath indeed described him to be a Spirit; what kind of Being that is we know not. The Christian, as well as the Cean Poet, will be equally at a Loss to describe his incomprehensible Nature. The Heathen therefore were pardonable, who, from their Incapacity of comprehending the Existence of a pure spiritual Being, attributed to their Deities Bodies, Senses, Appetites, &c.

Authority,

Authority of Christianity founded on them, but the universal Want of it, its Reasonableness, its Usefulness, and its Evidence, Miracles. Christians, by too curiously prying into Mysteries, and attempting to explain Things inexplicable, have passed over the more necessary and weighty Matters of Religion, and by that Means have injured it. The Doctrine of Atonement hath been lost in describing the Nature of its Author, and good Works rendered contemptible, almost useless, by extolling the superior Excellency of Faith.

The principal Article of the Christian Religion is the Doctrine of Atonement: This must be believed by all who have any Hopes in the Merits of Christ. We cannot be accounted Christians, unless we acknowledge that he hath made a full and perfect Satisfaction for the Sins of Mankind. The Promises of God, namely, *Forgiveness of Sin, and everlasting Life*, will be of none Effect, if we receive not this Truth; it is the Foundation of the Christian System.

What is there to obstruct our Faith in this Matter? Is the Doctrine, either improbable, unreasonable, or absurd? When we reflect upon the Corruption of our Manners, the Sins and Iniquities committed, for which human Wisdom could not find out a proper Expiation,

piation, is it not highly probable that God would prescribe a Method for us? Is it not reasonable to suppose, that a Satisfaction, if possible, equivalent to our Crimes and Offences should be given? Can it be accounted absurd to believe, that such a Satisfaction hath been made, when he that declared he made it, afforded such extraordinary Proofs of his Ability and Authority for that Purpose.

Can it be deemed impossible for God to make a Revelation of himself? Might it not have been expected from the Consideration of his Goodness, that he would not have given up Man, his favourite Creature, to Ignorance, Superstition, and Idolatry, nor have left him at a Loss concerning a sufficient Expiation for Sin, and at an Uncertainty about a future Existence? We must allow a Power in the Deity to do this; and if the Facts recorded in the Gospel are true, it is reasonable to believe that he hath so done.

This therefore is a necessary Article of Faith, *The full, perfect, and sufficient Satisfaction for Sin given in the Person of Jesus Christ, divinely appointed for that Purpose.* This Satisfaction Christ so appointed could have given, whether his Nature had been human, or divine, or both. He that believes he hath, may rest assured of his Salvation.

The Doctrine of a future State of Reward and Punishment must also be received by

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those, who admit the Truth of the Christian Religion: A Doctrine consistent with the Sense and Reason of Mankind, and agreeable to their Wish and Desire. It is not only the Comfort of the miserable and the wretched, but the Expectation of the wise, the great, and the good. The Pleasures and Enjoyments of this Life yield not a proper Satisfaction to a reasonable Being. If those who suffer Affliction and Distress, had no future Hope, how truly deplorable would be their Situation. Infinite is the Number of Subjects, which the Mind of Man museth upon, and wants to be acquainted with; yet his Knowledge is not very extensive: The Shortness of human Life, and the little Recess he enjoys from Business and necessary Engagements occasion it. The wicked also are often prosperous and flourishing, and the virtuous unfortunate and unhappy. For the several Reasons alledged, as well as to reward the good, and to punish the bad, another State seems to be both equitable and just: This Article of Faith therefore is approved by Reason. Of its Certainty, as to the Event, not the least Doubt can be entertained. He that hath said it shall be, is Almighty; his Power is without Limits, and his Wisdom without Controul. His Decree who can reverse? Hath
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he said, and shall he not do it? Hath he declared, and shall it not come to pass?

To deny or disbelieve a Doctrine so agreeable to Reason, and the general Opinion of Mankind, of whatever Sect or Nation, barbarous or civilized, Pagan or Christian, would be absurd, and shew a Want of common Sense. The receiving it as a divine Truth, thus strengthened and confirmed by Reason, and the concurrent Assent of Persons in all Ages, and of all Countries, learned and unlearned, good and bad, cannot be accounted a Weakness.

These are the two principal Doctrines of the Christian Religion, absolutely necessary to be believed by all, who allow of its Authority, and have Hope in its Promises: Doctrines concerning which the Scripture is very clear and express, and its Meaning free from Ambiguity and Uncertainty.

But Faith, tho' necessary, is not the only necessary Thing for Salvation; this gracious Blessing is tendered upon certain Conditions, upon the Performance of which present Pardon and future Happiness do depend.

To obtain the Benefit of Christ's Atonement, we must truly and sincerely repent of past Sins; his Satisfaction can be of no Use to such, who continue in their Wickedness,

or do not express a Sorrow and Detestation for the Sins they have committed : The Means also, Opportunities, and Incitements to a Repetition of former Guilt, must be carefully observed and avoided. Christ's Merits will absolve from Sin, but do not countenance, nor are they to be considered, either as a Justification, or a Dispensation for the Practice of it.

Is not this Condition of receiving the Benefit of Christ's Atonement both equitable and reasonable ? Is not Vice, which degrades the Dignity of human Nature, and levels the Man with the Brute, universally held odious and infamous ? Do not wicked Men confess it to be right, that they should forsake their Follies ? Would they be known to have committed any ? Are they not secretly ashamed, when they do ? Do they not after Enjoyment detest the Act ? This Condition therefore of the Gospel required of its Professors, namely, *Repentance of Sin*, is no Imposition upon their Judgment and Understanding, but agrees and coincides with their natural Sentiments of right and wrong, and the moral Obligations arising from them ; it is no more than what every Man in a State of Nature, without the Command of Revelation, looks upon himself bound to perform.

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The other Condition of procuring present Pardon and future Happiness is an Amendment of Life; this naturally flows from a sincere Repentance. It is very fit, that he who wants a Favour should appear deserving of it, or do something to deserve it. It must be allowed, because evident from various and daily Instances, that vicious Practices are not only prejudicial to the Peace and good Order of Society, but injurious to the Interest and Happiness of Individuals. All Men approve of, commend, and applaud, if they perform not, good and virtuous Deeds.

Doth Christianity then demand any Thing more than what, if it had not been revealed, we are strictly obliged to do? It hath imposed none other Burden upon us, than what the Ages before its Appearance laid upon themselves; the divine Sanction being only given to human Obligation. What before was a Law of Nature, is now become a Precept of Religion. What Men did from a firm Persuasion of its Necessity and Usefulness, is now done as acceptable and well pleasing to the Lord.

These are the necessary Articles of Faith, and the necessary Conditions of Salvation; these Articles believed, and these Conditions observed, we need not be under any Doubt

or Fear of not having fully performed every Thing required of us, to entitle us to the Benefits annexed to our Profession.

The Confession of Faith, which every Professor of Christianity, according to the Contents of the Gospel, ought to make, seems to be this: *I believe in God, the Creator of all Things, and in Jesus Christ, the appointed Means of Salvation, through Repentance, and Amendment of Life.*

Here is no Mystery; nothing hard to be believed, nothing contradictory to or above our Reason, and nothing but what is consistent with the Sense of Mankind. This is a Creed plain and intelligible, suited to the meanest Capacity, not open to cavil and dispute, and must be acknowledged worthy of Assent by the different Parties in Religion.

By this Creed we hazard nothing, and cannot incur any Guilt; but by fierce Contentions about Mysteries, and Things inexplicable, we expose our Weakness, become uncharitable, and render the Gospel System, than which none can be more reasonable and commendable, contemptible and absurd.

What hath been mentioned shews the Necessity of reading the Scripture; but what Parts of it are proper to be read? Is the whole equally useful, equally necessary? It is apprehended

prehended not. The Writings of the New Testament deserve the Attention of every Man ; those of the Old particularly belong to the Jews ; the Arguments drawn from them in Favour of Christianity, have a proper Force and Weight in Controversies with that People. The Completion of Prophecies is a particular Evidence addressed to the Jews, is of little Use in our Disputes with other Adversaries of Christianity ; it serves to confute and silence the one, but will not convince nor satisfy the other. The Heathen Converts were not made by refering them to the prophetical Writings, but by reasoning from the Expediency and Necessity of such a Revelation, and the Testimony given of its divine Authority by the working of Miracles.

I have no Intention to depreciate, either the Excellency or the Usefulness of the Books of the Old Testament ; but whoever reads with Candour, and judges with Impartiality, cannot look upon them all to have been the Work of Inspiration ; yet great Labour and much Learning have been unsuccessfully employed to establish their Reputation, and to give them a Turn different from their plain and obvious Meaning, in order to enlarge Proofs for a Cause that doth not want them.

The Characters of some of the Jewish Worthies seem not to have been the fairest; over which it is best to throw a Veil, since it will be found difficult to excuse or palliate their Vices, however we may admire and applaud their Virtues. There is no Occasion for vindicating the foulest Deeds, to give any Weight to the most pure and holy Religion.

If *Solomon's Song* was to be taken out, the Reading of some Part of *Genesis*, of the Law, and the *Judges* was to be omitted; *Susannah*, *Bel* and the *Dragon*, and *Tobit* not appointed to be read, if any longer continued, the People, it is imagined, would not be less edified. If the prophetical Writings, some Parts of which have a Reference to Christianity, were more, and the historical, which have respect only to the national Affairs of the Jews, less read, the ignorant and unlearned would receive more Benefit, and be better instructed in the Principles of their Religion.

If the Authority of Judaism is questioned, let its Professors vindicate it; what hath Christianity to dread or fear from the Controversy? That it will not be true, if that should be proved to be false? Wherefore? That was a peculiar, this an universal Religion; this would have been published, if Judaism had never existed; that was suited

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to the Nature, Disposition, and Temper of the Jews, and to none other People; but this is a System agreeable to the Sentiments, Desire, and Expectation of all People, even the Jews.

Christianity is in no Danger, whilst it hath Reason for its Support; it wants not to rest its Authority upon an Alliance with Judaism; it depends upon its Excellency and Goodness. Arguments of sound Reasoning, not References to ancient Predictions, were the Methods used by the Apostles for the Conversion of the Gentile: They did not establish the Authority of the Gospel by proving that of the Law, but by its own proper Evidence, *Miracles*. Christianity would have appeared in a better and more favourable Light to the Deists in all Ages, had its Advocates and Apologists kept more closely to the Apostles and Evangelists, than to the Patriarchs, the Law, and the Prophets. The enforcing and recommending the Doctrines and Precepts of Christ is undoubtedly more useful, than exploring into and explaining of ancient Notions: The latter may be an Amusement to the Learned, but the former is only of Benefit to the Christian.

If some Persons think, that all which is called Scripture can furnish out Matter for serious
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and useful Meditation, and in some Manner displays the Wisdom, Goodness, and Power of God in various Dispensations of his Providence, they are at Liberty to read; but certainly have no Right to object to others, who are of a different Opinion, cannot perceive it to be of such Use, nor receive any such Benefit from the Reading it: For the Salvation of Man is neither promoted nor injured in either Respect. It would be Presumption to say peremptorily, what should not be read, but to direct, not prescribe what should, will not, I hope, be deemed impertinent.

The Portions of Scripture absolutely necessary to be read, and diligently studied by Christians, are such as treat *concerning the Foundation of our Faith and Hope; which have respect unto our Redemption from Sin and Misery, and our future Salvation; which set forth the Manner of our Reconciliation with God, and our Title to everlasting Glory; which shew by what Means we are to obtain the one, and secure the other.*

These are weighty and important Matters; what we cannot be unacquainted with, nor ignorant of, without manifest Prejudice to our Salvation. These Matters are confined to the New, make no Part of the Contents of the Old

Old Testament; what immediately concerns us therein, are the Prophecies relating to the Person, the Character, and the Office of Christ: These we should carefully, impartially, and strictly examine, to see that there hath been no Fraud nor Imposition used, in order to render the Application in our Controversies with the Jews just and pertinent.

PROPHECIES.

No Prophecies should be received, but such as have a plain Reference to Christ, and appear to have been minutely accomplished in him. There may be many Passages in Scripture, which seemingly have an Allusion to some Actions of our Saviour, or some Circumstances in his Life concerning his Ministry, or his Sufferings; but unless they are so applied by Christ, or his Apostles, they ought not to be admitted as such, and it is Presumption so to apply them.

There is a sufficient Number of real and unexceptionable Prophecies, clearly and fully completed in the Person of Jesus, to prove him to have been the Messiah. If these cannot convince, nor satisfy the Jew, figurative and fictitious ones will be of little Weight. Proofs, the Work of Imagination not of Reason, taken from Similitudes, not natural
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but laboured, rather weaken than strengthen the Cause of Christianity. When there is a Sufficiency of direct and positive Proofs, recourse need not to be had to mystical and typical ones, which can only be true in a secondary Sense, supposing, what it will be difficult to evince, that they carry with them a Degree of Probability. To confirm the Pretensions of one, who fulfilled the Predictions relating to his Birth and Resurrection, (Things contrary to the established and fixed Laws of Nature) lesser Proofs are unnecessary, and studied ones not wanted. This is a Weakness similar to that, of thinking that the Power and Wisdom of him who created Man, can receive any additional Illustration by the Formation of a Reptile. The Jews are not more blameable for the perverting the Sense of Scripture, than Christians for such a Misapplication of it. Error may, but Truth cannot stand in need of false Supports.

Other Prophecies, besides those respecting Christ, though not of equal Importance, may merit a Perusal: The Completion of the former serves to confirm the Character of the Prophet, and to shew the Publication of the latter to have been from divine Authority.

Having selected out the Christian Prophecies, we may safely omit the Reading of the
other

other Parts of the Old Testament, as they contain nothing more of immediate Concern to us, and do not in any Manner affect our Salvation.

In the Writings of the New Testament, we should be careful to distinguish between those Precepts, or Rites, which are partial, respecting particular Churches then in being, for whose Use only they were written and ordained, and those of universal Obligation, which every Christian, of whatever Country, and in all Ages, to the Consummation of all Things, is bound to follow and observe. A Difference also should be made between the Arguments employed for the Conversion of the Jews, which are personal, and those employed for the Conversion of the Heathen, which are addressed to the Sense and Understanding of all Mankind. The Things which we ought to look into, and are highly culpable if we do not, are principally the following.

M I R A C L E S.

They were wrought in Confirmation of the Truth and Authority of Christianity; upon them, as the most material Evidence, Christ rested the Proof of his Mission; to them he appealed, when the Jews rejected his Application

cation of Prophecies, as equally applicable to other Things and Persons with himself, or objected against them, as having received a primary Completion in others: These were irresistible Arguments in his Favour, declared him really to have been, what the Prophecies had represented that he would be, *the Saviour of the World*.

By Means of them the Heathen were convinced, and we of these Days are assured, of the divine Authority of the Christian Religion. The Prejudices, Idolatries, and Superstitions of the Heathen would not have been mastered, had not an extraordinary Power been displayed. However excellent the Doctrines and Precepts taught, however worthy both of our Belief and Practice, they would have been considered as the Works of human Reason, if a supernatural Testimony had been wanting. The referring them to the Completion of Prophecies contained in the sacred Writings of the Jews, would have had no Weight with them, who entertained a very mean Opinion of that People, who at that Time were inconsiderable amongst the Nations. As upon this Evidence the divine Authority of Christianity rests, it highly concerns us to make a strict and impartial Inquiry
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into it, that we may not believe, nor hope in vain.

CHRIST'S SATISFACTION.

The Passages which set forth the Nature and Manner of the Redemption, deserve the Christian's most serious Attention; of them he cannot be innocently ignorant; they are the Foundation of his Faith, and Hope; by them he is made acquainted with the necessary and saving Truth of the Gospel, and assured of present Pardon, and future Happiness; they shew to him the Reasonableness of an Attonement for Sin, point out the Method pursued for that End, and assure him, by setting forth the Ability and Power of the Person who offered it, that he may safely and securely rely upon his Merits.

GOSPEL PRECEPTS.

These comprehend the Will of God, and are designed for a Rule of Life: The Performance of them is one of the Conditions of obtaining Forgiveness, and future Glory. Obedience is the best Proof that can be given of the Sincerity of our Faith; the Practice of Virtue the best Testimony of our Belief of the Truth of Christianity: Those Parts therefore of the New Testament, which signify to us
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the Obedience and Virtue necessary, certainly claim a particular Regard *.

These are the weighty and important Matters of the Gospel ; Matters which every Christian, who expects to partake of the Benefits of Christ's Merits, is concerned to know, and to receive as true. I presume not to say, that the other Parts are of no Use, but these alone make us wise unto Salvation.

Freethinking, though greatly depreciated by the weak, and warmly exclaimed against by Bigots, as of dangerous Tendency to the Cause of Virtue and Religion, is, when conducted

* The moral Duties of Christianity may be briefly comprehended under these four general Heads. *First*, To fear God, that is, to obey his Commandments, which includes those respecting our Duty to one another, as well as those relating to his Worship—*Second*, To honour the King, that is, to reverence that Form of Government under which we live, and the Magistrates set over us ; shewing all due Submission, and living in all peaceable Subjection to its Laws—*Third*, To love the Brotherhood, that is, to receive and entertain every true and sincere Christian, with the same Warmth of Affection and undisguised Friendship, as we would our natural Brother ; not to proportion our Love and Kindness towards him according to his Zeal for or Attachment to any particular Sect or Persuasion, but according to the Goodness of his Heart, and the Purity of his Life and Manners—*Fourth*, To do unto all Men, whatever we would that they should do unto us, that is, to exercise Charity, Beneficence, and Justice to all Mankind ; to act in the same Manner in every Thing, as we would that every Man should act towards us in the same Situation ; to relieve the distressed, comfort the broken hearted, protect the weak, redress the injured, succour the oppressed. This is the Substance of the moral Laws of Christianity : So that our Duty is comprised under few Heads, very easily known, we wish as readily and universally practiced.

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with Decency and Candor, of singular Service to the Cause of Truth. Errors are not to be discovered without free Inquiry: The Abuse or Misapplication of it is indeed hurtful, but not so hurtful as totally to set aside the Use of it. If Freethinking had met with proper Encouragement and Support from the civil Power, the gross Idolatries and Superstitions of the Heathen would have been lessened, if not removed, and a more sensible and rational Worship introduced and established amongst them.

Those who delivered their Sentiments freely concerning the national Deities, were declared to be Atheists, and suffered the Penalty of Proscription or Death; not that they were in the strict Sense of the Word Atheists, denying the Existence of a supreme Cause, but from an impartial and candid Examination into the Nature and Merits of their Deities, and from observing the absurd and indecent Rites instituted in Honour of them, they could not submit to such an Abuse of their Reason, as to offer divine Adoration to Beings, who were rather the Object of their Contempt, than their Praise.

A similar Fate attends those, who have Resolution to oppose vulgar Errors, and to examine into established Opinions. Implicit Assent may

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be given, when Men are infallible; human Reason may then safely submit to absolute Prescription: But the Doctrine of Infallibility is absurd; the Title, though claimed, hath never been proved to the Satisfaction even of the Possessor. If established Opinions are just and right, why should they be admitted without previous Examination? To prohibit or condemn such an Examination is a Violence done to human Liberty, confines, not extends, human Knowledge. A State of Idiotism and Slavery is preferable to the Possession of Reason without Use, of Liberty without Exertion. Let ancient Writers be respected, not followed as infallible Guides, nor their Works treated of equal Value and Importance with the sacred Writings: They may be permitted to direct, not to dictate; to advise, not to prescribe; for however great their Integrity, they cannot be totally exempt from Error.

Ancient Customs are rigidly adhered to; frequently admired and applauded, merely because ancient. To attribute more than an Equality of Parts and Genius to our Forefathers, is a servile Adulation paid to them at the Expence of common Sense: As Men they had their Weaknesses, and their Prejudices: Justly celebrated are their Works, yet in many Things

Things they have been proved mistaken, and to have accommodated themselves to the prevailing Ignorance, Credulity, or Circumstances of the Age in which they lived, rather than have confined themselves strictly and closely to the Truth. It is not otherwise easy to account for the Absurdities of Heathenism and Popery, their great Prevalency, and long Continuance, when there was no Dearth of learned and ingenious Men: Sincerity, not Ability, was wanted. Their Knowledge was great; yet a Freedom of Inquiry and Openness of Behaviour were necessary to render it truly useful and beneficial. Examples of Virtue and Piety are worthy of Imitation; but it is not good to admit and adhere to Opinions, before they have been freely and candidly considered; our Faith may be perverted, and our Morals injured through this Weakness. Heresies would have been few, and have died with their Founders, had Men exercised their own Judgment, and not been deceived by the Greatness of Names, to adopt the Notions they recommended: Future Ages giving into the same Weakness, render such Notions respectable and venerable, and make it a Work of great Labour and Danger, if wrong, to oppose and destroy them. It is not therefore strange, that Falsehood should be adopted for Truth, and when adopted,

should be persisted in ; Weakness and Obstinacy being fellow Associates, and Names having in all Ages been too much respected. Men have been more fond of shewing their Reading, than of exercising their Understanding, and of acquiring a Reputation of Learning from expressing what others have said, than considering what ought to have been said ; thinking by this Meanness and Servility they shall themselves become of Consequence and Importance.

It is difficult to eradicate Prepossessions ; Length of Time, and a general Acquiescence, are a kind of sacred Testimony to the grossest Errors : These, where divine Inspiration is wanting, Freethinking alone can detect. I would not be understood, as ascribing to Reason and Philosophy the Power of obviating the Mistakes of the Heathen ; Mistakes so long established, strengthened by Tradition, supported by the State, rivetted by Education, credited by the Good, assented to by the Learned, received by the Great, zealously adhered to by the Vulgar, agreeable to the general Sense of all People, the Jews excepted, and the Custom of all Nations, could not have been effectually obviated by any other Method, than that which the Deity in his own Time applied. However, the grosser Mistakes

stakes of the Heathen would have been cancelled by a Freedom of Thinking. A *Socrates* and a *Plato*, a *Cato* and a *Cicero*, could have made great Advances in correcting the Superstition of the Times, if it had been consistent with their own Safety, and they could have obtained the Concurrence, at least the Connivance, of their respective States: Persons of such distinguished Parts must have seen through the Credulity of the People, occasioned by the Delusions of Priests, and the Pretensions of Legislators to divine Communications.

Should Freethinking then be discouraged? Yet it is generally opposed. Hath it not in all Ages been found highly beneficial to the true Interest of Mankind? Hath not this Nation, in many Things, experienced its Usefulness? Was it not by Freethinking that our Forefathers shook off the grievous and oppressive Yoke of Papal Tyranny, and got rid of the Load of abominable Idolatry and Superstition, under which they, and their Ancestors, had a long Time groaned?

May not Freethinking also be of Use towards effecting an Union amongst Protestants, whose unhappy Divisions are not a little advantageous to the Cause of Popery? By it several of the Canons, Articles, Rites, and Ceremonies, with some Parts of the

Liturgy of the established Church, would appear to be useless, unnecessary, and obsolete, and others pertinent, expedient, and just: By this Means the Conceit of one Party, and the Obstinacy of the other, would be removed. As it is paying too great a Compliment to human Reason to ascribe Perfection to it, so is it too much depreciating its Excellency to suppose it to be in every Thing erroneous. We are not to believe with the zealous Sectarist, that our Mode of Worship is full of Spots and Blemishes, no more than we are to imagine with the Bigots of our own Party, that it is perfect and entire, wanting nothing. Happy Nation, if an Union could be accomplished as in civil, so in religious Matters: The glorious Events that have succeeded it in the State, speak much in Favour of the Advantages that the Cause of Christianity might receive from it: However, it is an Encouragement to make the Experiment; to do it successfully, a Liberty of thinking and speaking must be permitted: In the Exertion of which several Things disagreeable will be spoken by both Parties: To know how to determine right, they must hear with Patience, and judge with Candour: To correct what is amiss, they must amicably consent to have their Weakness laid open, and submit their Opinions to the sole Arbitration of

of Reason and the Scriptures, paying no Regard to any other Writings and Authority: To dispute with Success, they must cancel the different Prejudices they have imbibed, and avoid Words of Acrimony and Reproach.

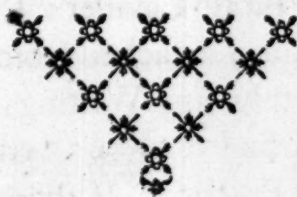
Freethinking would also be of considerable and eminent Service towards stopping the rapid Progress of Deism. Christianity would not appear in a less favourable Light, if the Canon of the sacred Scriptures was revised, Passages exceptionable were erased, and others, which have no Relation to, or Connection with the Christian Scheme, omitted. If this shall be attempted, an End will be put to that Mirth, Ridicule, and Contempt, which seem unavoidable, when Men are gravely reasoning about Trifles, piously spiritualizing the most luscious and indecent Expressions, and seriously palliating and vindicating Actions, the most cruel and unjust, to prevent an Odium and Infamy from falling upon the Authors and Relators: These Things have been objected to by Deists, and been principally the Occasion of their Dislike to Christianity: Until a Revival of the Canon shall take Place, we may expect to see their Number increased, not lessened.

Deism is swiftly advancing by the Countenance it hath received from the Learned,

the Wealthy, and the Great; it is a formidable Adversary; yet it may be easily foiled, and that by its own Weapon: Freethinking is their Pride and Glory; let it be ours: Their Cause thrives by the Superstition and Credulity of their Opponents, and in Matters not respecting the Authority of Religion, Examine Things by Reason; whatever she disapproves of, or condemns, is not fit to be retained: Let it be given up, Christianity will not suffer; for it stands in no Need of false Supports: It addresses itself to the Understanding of Mankind, and is willing to submit to, or fall by its impartial Decision; It deserves not to be censured for Opinions drawn from it, which appear to be inconsistent with, contradictory to, or incomprehensible by Reason; though such Opinions being enforced by Authority are injurious to it.

The Christian Religion may challenge and dare the most subtle Caviller; Let him read it with Impartiality, detached from every Prejudice, unbiassed by any Writings for or against it, and he will find it to be a System worthy of his Assent and Practice. If there had not been so much Labour (ill employed) in recommending and vindicating unintelligible Doctrines in all Ages of the Church, the Adversaries of Christianity (if any) would have been fewer

fewer in Number, and the Name of an Heretick scarce known. The Vanity of the Learned gave Rise to strange Doctrines ; they could not think of being upon a Level with the Vulgar in Respect of religious Knowledge. Whilst this Vanity continues, Free-thinking, which exposes it, and rejects, as unnecessary, Articles of Faith, which Reason cannot understand, or form any Idea of, will meet with no Encouragement, and be loudly exclaimed against as of evil and dangerous Tendency, but with great Injustice ; for, like a Refiner's Fire, it will only purge away the Dross, that is, remove those absurd Opinions, which have been so blended with Scripture, as to have been commonly mistaken for it.



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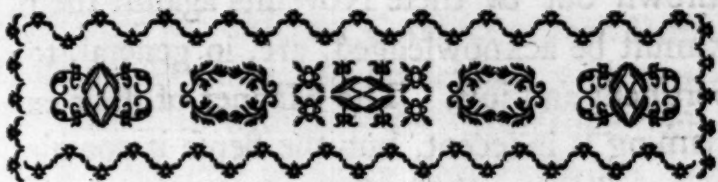
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NEW SECTS.

METHODISM, which rose from a slender Beginning, is branched out into various Sects, and hath met with such Success as to become alarming; its Progress, in some Measure, hath been owing to the Perseverance of its Heads, and the indifferent Opinion entertained of it by sensible and understanding People, as a Thing that, in the Course of a few Years, would dwindle away of itself: Time however hath shewn the Reverse.

It had its Origin partly from the Neglect of the superior Clergy of the Duties of their Function: This Neglect continued is its great Support, and from it Strength is daily acquiring, and the Number of its Friends increasing. The Censures and Complaints thrown

thrown out by these Novelists against them, it must be acknowledged, are, in general, too pertinent and just. The Manner of their exclaiming is indecent, but the Sense it contains is very striking, because true.

The Conduct of the Clergy upon this Occasion is somewhat unaccountable: They have talked, they have wrote, they have preached against them, and their Tenets, with Justice indeed, but not without Acrimony: This hath rendered their Design abortive, and not a little served the Cause of their Adversaries. The best Confutation of the Error, and the Way to silence every Clamour, would be to disprove the Charge brought against them, *of being indolent, regardless of their Flock, seeking only their own private Advantage and Emolument.*

If the Zeal of these Novelists is without Knowledge, if they deceive the Multitude to enrich themselves, do they not appear earnest in Prayer? Are they not laborious in Preaching? Should not those, whose Maintenance is by Law established, who have no Occasion from Necessity to deceive, and who may be zealous according to the Truth, be equally earnest, equally laborious? Until they are so, it is absurd to murmur at Desertion in the Churches, or to inveigh against the crowded Tabernacles:

Tabernacles : These Consequences naturally flow from the different Conduct of each Party. Talking, Writing, or Preaching, will prove ineffectual to withdraw the Multitude, who from indecently opposing their Doctrines, and violently insulting their Persons, have now greedily imbibed the one, and hold the other in the greatest Admiration ; receiving both with a kind of religious Respect and Veneration. The Church, in all Probability, will decrease, and the Tabernacle increase, until Residence, upon Livings admitting it, is enjoined by Authority, Pluralities are destroyed *, and a decent Provision made for the inferior and necessitous Clergy ; which would be of considerable Advantage both to the State and Religion : Their Poverty being a great Hindrance to the Work of the Ministry ; for who regards the Words of a poor Man ? Before the Dissolution of religious Houses the inferior Clergy were rich and useless, since that Time they have been very useful, and very poor, and what is worse, are likely so to continue.

Pluralities have been always deemed, for just and weighty Reasons, a Reproach to our

* It is not to be understood, that no Minister ought to possess or enjoy more than one Living, unless that Living is capable of affording a decent and comfortable Subsistence for himself and Family.

Ecclesiastical Polity : They are more so in these Times, when, from the publick and frequent Sale of Livings, less Encouragement is given, than heretofore, to those, who from their Situation and Condition in Life must look for Advancement by Merit. To confine Ecclesiasticks to personal Residence would be the Means of destroying Pluralities, and be very useful in checking the Progress of Enthusiasm. It is fit this Reproach should be removed.

Pure Religion, from the prevailing Licentiousness of the Great, the Enthusiasm of the Vulgar, and the Extravagance of the middle Class of People, requires the full Exertion of the Abilities of its publick Professors : Precepts alone, though good, are dead : Example quickens and enlivens them.

If the superior Clergy wearied themselves in labouring, not solely for Temporals, but also for the spiritual Welfare of the People, Divisions would soon be at an End, Enthusiasm die away, and the Great be as eminently distinguished for Piety and Goodness, as their Honours and their Titles. Whilst Ecclesiasticks are seen more at Court than at Church, or in an abject and servile Manner, exposing both their Sense and Character, incessantly soliciting Persons of Distinction and
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in Power; with a total Neglect of the Duties of their Function, some Men will look upon Religion to be no better than Priestcraft, and be induced to give the Preference to Deism; and others, who have neither Patron nor Interest, will think it no Crime to follow the Pattern set before them, in making it equally beneficial by introducing new Opinions.

Unless some Expedient is found to check the Progress of Enthusiasm, it will soon become formidable, and have its spacious Tabernacles in every City and County, as well as in *London* and *Middlesex*. Preachers will never be wanting, whilst there are so many poor, consequently discontented Clergy amongst the inferior Order; nor will Contributions ever fail in the lower Class of People, whilst they have the Fit of being too religious. They are fond of Innovations, because it gives them an Air of Importance; which, when they have heartily entered into them, they will espouse and support to the utmost of their Power, and never give up without dangerous and violent Commotions. Instances of this Truth we, as well as other States, have experienced.

Thus the Houses of God in the Land will be deserted, their Ministers held in Contempt,

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and the Cry of the Church and Orthodoxy be deemed somewhat similar to that of the *Grecian* Craftsmen, *Great is Diana of the Ephesians*. The Consequences are obvious: The State will find it necessary to interpose its Authority; which Interposition will unavoidably terminate in Disorder and Confusion.

That there are so many Sects amongst us need not surprise; it may be justly Matter of Surprise that there are not more, that every Day doth not produce something new, some new Way to Happiness. The Propagators of any Opinions, however ridiculous and absurd, would notwithstanding be successful, if they put on the Appearance of Piety, and laboured with Earnestness and unwearied Diligence to recommend them. Profelytes are very easily gained, since Mankind are so weak as to rely upon the Judgment and Veracity of others, and are unwilling or indisposed to make Use of their Liberty and Reason, in enquiring and examining, in reading and searching into the Scriptures, to see whether these Things are so or not. The Scriptures are so full and plain in Matters respecting Faith and Practice, that if we are deceived and imposed upon by Men of more Zeal than Knowledge, or of more Knowledge than Honesty, it is our own Fault, and we are consequently answerable for the
Prejudices

Prejudices imbibed *. He who reads them with Care and Attention will be always guarded against the Weakness of Superstition, the extravagant Flights of Enthusiasm, and the pernicious Effects of Bigotry. Was it not for them, amidst such a Variety of opposite and contradictory Opinions, we should not be a little perplexed to discover the Intention and Use of the Christian Religion, and in the End be induced to abide by Deism, or to be of no Religion. The most popular and prevailing Tenets of these Novelists will be considered, and their inconsistency with Reason and Religion shewn.

Faith without Works is preached by some.

If the Doctrine was true, when vicious Practices so much prevail, prejudicial to the Welfare of Society, and destructive of the Interest and Happiness of Individuals, it would be prudent and humane to conceal the Know-

* In this age of Enthusiasm, how necessary is it diligently to search the Scriptures. Trust not wholly to your Ears; listen to the Voice of Reason: You have an Understanding, use it: The Scriptures are in your Possession, read them. If unwilling to trust to yourself, there are Persons of approved Ability, Integrity, and Piety, consult them, and they will assist you. If honest and modest, you will not be fond of, but oppose Innovations, more hurtful, than useful. Scripture, when read with Attention and Candour, will afford you sufficient Satisfaction in any Matter of Consequence, and detect the most plausible Error.

ledge of it. Faith in the Merits of Christ, though necessary, is not the only Thing necessary to Salvation: It is indeed the Foundation, but good Works are the Superstructure: Unless they are performed, there can be no reasonable Hopes of obtaining future Happiness. A mere internal Profession cannot save us: St. James hath plainly proved it. *A Man may say, Thou hast Faith, and I have Works; shew me thy Faith without thy Works, and I will shew thee my Faith by my Works.* To this he adds, *The Devils also believe and tremble.* What then becomes of this saving Faith exclusive of good Works? Doth not St. James represent such Believers to be in the same Condition with the Devils?

Consistent with this Representation of the Apostle are the Sentiments of his Master. *Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but he that doth the Will of my Father, who is in Heaven:* said Christ. The same Doctrine is taught by Saint Paul, who treats good Works as more valuable than Faith. *Now abideth Faith, Hope, and Charity; but the greatest of these is Charity.* By Charity is not to be understood according to the Context, *the doing Acts of Kindness and Beneficence to our Neighbour;* but rather, and more agreeable to Saint John, who hath

hath the same Greek Word, and uses it in this Sense, *The Fear of God, and the keeping of his Commandments*: And for this just Reason, because good Works display and confirm the Reality and Sincerity of our Faith. *Hereby do we know that we know him, if we keep his Commandments*: saith Saint John. *He that hath my Commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me*: saith Christ.

The Inefficacy of pure simple Faith towards procuring Salvation may be further illustrated. *Many will say in that Day*, (that is, the Day of Judgment,) *Lord have we not prophesied in thy Name, and in thy Name cast out Devils, and in thy Name have done many wonderful Works*. Faith is here urged as a Reason for being admitted to a Participation of the Joys of Heaven; but what is the Answer of Christ? *Then will I profess unto them, I never knew ye, depart from me, ye that Work Iniquity*: Which is a Confirmation of Saint James's Words, that a bare naked Faith profiteth nothing.

The Parable of the Talents, and Christ's Proceeding at the last Day, are Proofs also of the same Doctrine: They shew good Works to be absolutely necessary, inasmuch as no Reward will be conferred without them;

that a sound Faith without a sound Practice will avail nothing; and that it is of no Use to say, *Lord, I have known, or acknowledge thee,* unless we can add, *Lord, I have obeyed thee.*

The Passages produced, concerning the Importance of good Works equally with Faith, are clear and unexceptionable: To which the Words of Saint *James* may be pertinently subjoined, *That as the Body without the Spirit is dead, even so Faith without Works is dead also.* Those Things therefore which God hath joined together, let no Man presume to put asunder.

For what Purpose did Christ die? Was it to release Men from the Obligation to the Practice of Piety and Goodness? Most certainly not: It was to absolve those Men from the Guilt of Sin, and to rescue them from the dreadful Consequence of it, eternal Misery, who by a sincere Repentance, and a future Amendment of their Lives, should render themselves deserving of such Blessings. Is this Method of preaching Christianity consistent with this gracious Purpose? Is it reasonable to suppose, that a Being of perfect Holiness should not have made Holiness one necessary Condition of Acceptance with him? Most assuredly,

assuredly, and thus we find it; for an Acknowledgment of the Truth of Revelation, unless its moral Duties are observed, will not be of any Advantage to the Christian: There will be no Happiness without Goodness. To partake of the Blessings of Christ, we must not only believe in his Doctrines, but also imitate the Example of his virtuous Life: There will be no Reward conferred, unless it is by our Actions deserved, or by Repentance procured.

What is Faith? An Acknowledgment that Jesus Christ was the appointed Means of Salvation to Mankind: This is the plain and intelligible Doctrine of the Scripture. Will Faith alone save? Why then are good Works insisted upon? If the Doctrine was true, Christianity would have very few, if any, Adversaries. The Difficulty doth not lie in believing, but in acting like a Christian. The Number of Christians by Profession is great, by Practice small.

Good Works, say some, are to be wrought, not as having any Merit in them, but as a Testimony of our Gratitude to Christ, and cannot make the Doers thereof perfect. Of themselves it is allowed they cannot, neither have our Virtues sufficient Merit to entitle us

to the divine Favour. The Obligation however to perform them is not founded upon a mere Testimony of our Gratitude; it arises from its being a positive Precept of our Lord, and absolutely necessary for our eternal Salvation; unless they are performed, though we believe Christ to be the Saviour of Mankind, he cannot be so to us.

To boast of our good Works, we who are encompassed with so many Infirmities, or to say we need no Forgiveness, who are frequently guilty of Folly, would be both vain and absurd: And would it not be equally so, imperfect as our Righteousness is, not to do what we are able? Therefore, though good Works alone cannot justify us in the Sight of God, they are absolutely necessary to be done by us, to entitle us to the Benefits of Christ's Redemption. Our Goodness without his Merits is nothing worth; and his Merits without our Goodness, imperfect as it is, are alike unprofitable.

No one can be a Christian without Faith, nor can the Benefits arising from it be obtained without the Performance of the Duties prescribed to us in the Gospel. If Faith alone made the Christian, would not the profligate and wicked be so accounted? For they have not, neither can have any just Exceptions
against

against the Doctrines of Revelation, though they transgress its Precepts. We may know Christ, and call him Lord; we may believe in and acknowledge the Power and Efficacy of his Sufferings; all this will avail nothing, cannot entitle us to a Place in the Kingdom of Heaven, unless, as he hath said, *We do the Will of his Father, who is in Heaven.*

Let us ascribe our Salvation to Jesus Christ, because he hath made the Atonement for our Sins, and shewn us the Way to Happiness; but let us forbear saying, that our Salvation is in his Power alone, that we cannot do any Thing of ourselves towards it. What saith the Scripture? *But few will be saved.* If the Salvation of the few is to be attributed to Jesus, to whom shall we impute the Damnation of the rest?

The Situation of those who believe the Doctrine of Faith without Works, and rest their future Salvation upon it, may be compared to Passengers in a Ship in the Midst of a Storm, when every Wave threatens a Wreck, and every Blast of Wind presages Ruin; so near a Prospect of Danger fills the Mind with various Thoughts: They have recourse to every Method that Imagination suggests, or Terror compels, to prevent the unhappy Catastrophe in View; think every
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Plank will save them, and eagerly embrace, as the Means of their Preservation, what serves to bring upon them swift Destruction : So these Men, when Age, Infirmary, or Disease, hath produced Reflection, the Enjoyment of sensual Pleasures being over, or disagreeable, stung with Remorse for their past Follies, and justly dreading the Severity of that Punishment which they have merited, are full of Uneasiness, Disquietude, and Perplexity, about their Salvation. In this uncomfortable Situation, having the Prospect of eternal Death before them, and fluctuating between Hope and Despair, they hastily, without any Inquiry, adopt any Notion, which can sooth the Upbraidings, and alay the Terrors of their guilty Conscience : To such the Doctrine of Faith without Works is highly pleasing and acceptable : Glad to be saved at any Rate, they greedily embrace what exposes them to that Ruin, which Repentance and Amendment of Life would have prevented.

It is confidently affirmed, *That we cannot know our Duty, and have neither Will nor Power to perform it, unless the Holy Spirit pleases to make it known to us by inward Illuminations, and gives to us both the Will and the Power.*

Is this the Language of a reasonable and thinking Being? Is it agreeable to a System of Religion, which addresses itself to the Reason and Understanding of Mankind? Is it consistent with the Nature of Man? Was he not created free? Is he not accountable for his Actions *? But where is his Freedom, if his Will is determined? Can he be accountable for his Actions, who hath no Power of himself to act? Would it not have been better never to have had Existence, or that the End of Life should have been the End of

* Doth not every Man find himself possessed of a Will to choose, a Freedom to act, and a Reason to determine what is right and wrong? But if these Powers cannot be exercised, are they not unnecessary? Are they not useless? If we are not at Liberty to take the Side either of Virtue or Vice, what End could the Imposition of Laws have answered? Without this Indifference human Actions could not be denominated virtuous or vicious, and consequently neither rewarded, nor punished: For would there be any Merit in doing, what we could not avoid doing? Doth that Act reflect any Glory upon him, by whose arbitrary and compulsive Authority it is done? Though the Almighty is perfectly happy in himself, and all glorious; tho' it is certain, that neither our Obedience nor Disobedience can be the least Addition to, or Diminution of his Happiness or his Glory, yet could he as Creator be glorified as he ought, if we had neither the Will, nor Power of ourselves to do any Thing? To illustrate this Observation by an Instance: To adore and worship the supreme Being, is a Duty that Nature dictates, Reason approves of, and Religion enjoins, as it is from him we have received our Being, and by his kind Providence supplied with every Thing useful and necessary for the Comfort and Support of Life: But if the Performance of this Duty is not left to ourselves, and we were to be compelled, or determined, to act agreeable to it, what could be its Value or Worth?

Existence

Existence, than to be judged, and condemned to suffer eternal Misery, for not doing what he could not do?

But this is not the Condition of Man, nor are such the Doctrines of the Christian Religion: It hath plainly communicated to him a Knowledge of God and his Duty: It hath set before him Good and Evil, Life and Death, but doth not determine his Choice, knowing him to be at Liberty to accept or refuse either: It exhorts him to practise Virtue, and intreats him to abstain from Vice, but lays no absolute nor irresistible Commands upon him, because he is by Nature free to do whatever pleaseth him; if otherwise, though the Almighty in his Goodness might reward Mankind, he could not, consistent with his Justice, punish any one.

To assert, that unless he pleases to afford his divine Assistance I cannot be saved, when the Scriptures call upon us, *to work out our Salvation with Fear and Trembling*; to say, that we are entirely passive in the Work of our Salvation, when Christ calls upon us *to repent*, and hath positively declared, that *unless we love God, and keep his Commandments, we shall have no Part in the Kingdom of Heaven*; to believe, that we cannot procure the divine Assistance, but that must be the free
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and voluntary Gift of God, when we are told, by unerring Truth, that *to him who asketh will the Holy Spirit be given*, are Assertions and Positions, not only plainly repugnant to sacred Writ, but inconsistent with Reason, as they make Men mere Machines, and blasphemous, as they attribute the Salvation and Damnation of Mankind to the Holy Spirit: Whereas the plain and simple Doctrines of Christianity concerning these important Matters are, that our Salvation is through the Blood of Christ (which cleanseth and purifieth us from all Manner of Sin and Wickedness) with Repentance and Amendment of Life, and our Damnation will be the Consequence of a constant and habitual Practice of Vice, which renders the Satisfaction of Christ of no Use.

If Christ hath done all, and left nothing for us to do, or the Holy Spirit must do all, and we cannot do any Thing either of or for ourselves, is not Preaching vain? Are not the Scriptures superfluous? Is not Virtue unnecessary? Are not these Opinions injurious to the Peace and Safety of Society? If you take away Freedom from Man, do you not destroy the Usefulness, the Force, and the Authority of its Laws? Would it not be cruel to punish Men for the Commission of Crimes which they

they cannot oppose, nor resist; and unjust to command them to do, when they have not the Power of acting for themselves? Society cannot subsist without Laws: Vice and Folly, as it is, too much prevail; but they would much more abound, if Men considered themselves as not responsible for their Actions: This they cannot be, if they are not to be accounted free Agents.

Why is there so much, or indeed any Wickedness in the World? Could a Being so gracious and merciful, as God is represented to be, have permitted any Man to be miserable, if he could have prevented it? We must so think, if we admit the Opinion under Consideration to be true. What an horrid Idea doth it convey to us of the supreme Being! Is not Atheism less absurd? How could such a Thought have entered into the Heart of Man? God could not have created any Man to be unhappy, much more could he have had any Pleasure and Delight in the Distresses of the unfortunate: This is a Disposition not to be found in Man, who pities and compassionates the afflicted, even the deserving to suffer. Man's Misery is from himself, and not from God.

Reason before the Publication of Christianity was his Rule of Life, since that Time
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he is under the Government of divine Laws, which are agreeable to his Reason, and supply its Deficiency: But if these Laws are not intelligible by him without the divine Aid, it would have been better for him to have been left to the Government of his Reason: For weak and imperfect as it may be accounted, it is certainly far preferable to an unintelligible Revelation.

In the Gospel the Manner and Nature of our Redemption, what hath been done to procure it, and what is to be done to partake of it, are plainly set forth. There is no Want of inward Illuminations to know these Things: They are so clearly written, that every one may be able, without Guide, without Interpreter, sufficiently to understand them. There is no need of divine Grace for his Instruction, or for the right Understanding thereof. Every Man may understand enough to make him wise unto Salvation: What more is wanted? Greater, but not better Knowledge may be attained: Knowledge beyond this is rather curious, than instructive. Metaphysical Speculations, and Inquiries into Mysteries, have yielded little Satisfaction, occasioned much Disputation, and been favourable to the Cause of Scepticism and Deism.

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If inward Grace is absolutely necessary to the Knowledge of Christianity and our Duty, should not all Men be equally Partakers of it? Should the Means of Salvation be withheld from any one? Are not all Mankind equally the Objects of the divine Favour and Love? Would it not have been the best, the safest, and the shortest Way to have given no written Revelation, if it was to have been unintelligible, and to have impressed upon the Mind of every Man a full and complete Sense of its Contents? There is no apparent Necessity for both: He who made Man, who knew the Nature and Extent of his Capacity, could certainly have composed his Laws in such Manner, as to be fully apprehended without a supernatural Aid.

The Gospel doth not only contain Proofs of the divine Authority of our most holy Religion, but also that Rule of Faith and Manners, which all Christians are commanded, and bound strictly to adhere to, and observe. Every one may know, whether or no he acts right, by comparing his Actions with that Rule: On this Account it is so plainly written, as to be clear and obvious to every Man's Capacity. What need to call in the Assistance of the Holy Spirit, to explain his own gracious Revelation? If the Things revealed were necessary

cessary to be revealed and known, can we suppose that he, who is the Perfection of Wisdom, should have delivered them, either imperfectly, or obscurely? We cannot suppose it: The Scriptures are against us. Do the Duties respecting the Worship of God, the Love of our Neighbour, and the living honestly and soberly, want any Explanation, or require a peculiar Inspiration to understand? Equally clear are the Scriptures in every Thing else, which concerns either our Faith, or Practice: Our Reason is sufficient for the right and full Understanding of all Things necessary to be known and believed.

Christianity hath been represented indeed, as containing Things difficult to be understood, and therefore not so clear and intelligible as it ought to be: To obviate this Objection, it hath been usually said, *That every Thing pertaining to Salvation is plainly revealed, and easily known; that of other Truths, with which we have no immediate Concern, we may be innocently and safely ignorant.* This Reasoning may be sufficient with the pious and humble Christian, but will appear, upon a close and serious Examination, to be both weak and unjust; for whatever hath been revealed, was undoubtedly proper to be revealed; it was either Matter of Duty, or of Faith. Is it not

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then fit that such Truths should be fully known, and understood, by those who are to believe, and observe them?

Christianity hath not any Mysteries, nor doth it require our Assent to any Thing, which is above our Apprehension and Understanding; though the Almighty hath a Right to demand and exact, whatever Obedience he, in his Wisdom, shall judge most meet; we never find him commanding, nor requiring Things unreasonable and absurd. If there are any Mysteries in Religion, we are not concerned to know them: Their Nature is not unfolded to us; and for this Reason, because we, who are principally conversant in Matter, who can neither think nor reason without the Mediation of the Senses, cannot have a just Conception of Subjects purely spiritual: We can conceive of them as something distinct from ourselves, but in what the Distinction consists, who can say? What we cannot understand, nor others explain to us, do not belong to us: If Inspiration is wanting in any Thing, it is in such Subjects: It is however apprehended, that the Salvation of Man doth not depend in any Manner on the Belief of Things inexplicable.

Divines indeed have found out Mysteries in Religion, which God hath not revealed: By attempting

attempting to explain what is inexplicable, and was not intended to be understood, they have raised Prejudices against what hath been plainly revealed : By endeavouring to explain the Nature of the Christian Doctrines, they have invalidated their Truth, rendered them suspected, and made them the Ridicule and Sport of Infidelity.

The Scriptures contain no impenetrable Secrets, nor unintelligible Truths, except Prophecies ; whose Meaning cannot be truly and justly ascertained, 'till after they have had a Completion. Every Thing recorded in the Gospel may, by an impartial and unprejudiced Examiner, not slavishly attached to any Sect, Party, or Perswasion, be understood, as far as it was intended *.

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* The Difficulties of Scripture belong not either to its Doctrines, or its Precepts, are principally occasioned by Allusions to certain ancient Rites, Customs, and Traditions, Jewish or Pagan, and the Stile being, according to the Eastern Manner, bold, figurative, and parabolical : Which Allusions, if known according to their common Acceptation and Import, would serve as a beautiful and pertinent Illustration of the Precept, the Doctrine, or Matter of Fact, enforced, recommended, or related. However, the Obscurity and Uncertainty of their Meaning do not affect the Truth of the Things themselves, or render it dubious.

These Difficulties may be easily removed by a new Translation of the Bible into modern Language, and rendering the Eastern Idioms, Phrases, and Similes, into such as are in frequent and common Use amongst ourselves : This would be of considerable Benefit and Service to all Readers, more especially to the common People : By this Means the Scriptures would be
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To instance in a Doctrine exploded by some, coolly treated of by others, and indifferently spoken of by many, *The Trinity*: Of this Doctrine we have as clear an Idea, as the Scripture hath revealed; it saith, that there is one God, and mentions, *Father, Son, and Holy Ghost*, whose Names, Offices, and Relations to Mankind are distinct. The Father is said to have created, the Son to have redeemed, and the Holy Ghost to have sanctified. *: The Meaning of these Truths may be clearly perceived and understood, and therefore it would be unreasonable to refuse our Assent to them: But of the Nature of these Persons, and the Manner of their Existence, the Senses can form no Idea, human

more easily and much better understood, and Commentators, &c. would be rendered unnecessary, who are almost useless, inasmuch as by their different and contradictory Opinions and Interpretations of the same Passages, they confound and perplex the Understanding and Judgment of their Readers, leaving them frequently in Doubt and Uncertainty, or more ignorant than they found them; or else instilling into their Minds Prejudices, not less injurious to Truth, than destructive of private Peace, brotherly Love, and Charity.

* I can admit these Truths, because I have a clear Perception of their Meaning. Can the same be said of three distinct Persons, and three distinct Gods, and but one God? How can these Things be? What Idea can be formed of them by the Senses? Who are these Persons? What is their Nature? How do they exist? How are they to be distinguished from three distinct Beings? What doth the Word Person signify? What Substance? Can a Person exist without Substance? Who can explain these Things to me? Man cannot. Will the Scriptures? No such Terms nor Expressions are to be met with in them.

Reason

Reason cannot discover, nor hath Revelation communicated to us: What therefore is not the Object of our Faith, should not be of our Inquiry. The confounding the Doctrine, which we are to believe, with the Nature of it, which we are not called upon to believe, and of which the Scriptures say nothing, hath been an Inducement with some for dissenting from the established Church, and hath occasioned others to leave Christianity for Deism, from the Supposition of its countenancing Opinions inconsistent with the Purity, Majesty, and Unity of the supreme Being. The Fruits of the most assiduous and laborious Searches into the Nature of the Christian Doctrines, are Error and Ignorance: It cannot surprise, that Men who walk in Darkness should lose their Way: Inquiries of this Sort therefore are better laid aside, they do not belong to us, will prove of no Use, confound and distract the most Learned, may administer something to the Pride and Vanity of Man, but will neither make him wiser, nor better.

It might be imagined, from the infinite Number (daily increasing) of Paraphrasts, Annotators, Commentators, Compilers, Historians, Criticks, &c. of the sacred Text, that the Bible was the hardest Book (which should

be the easiest) of any to be understood, and its Sense and Meaning the most difficult to be discovered; that no one, besides them, knew what Religion was, and that the Salvation of other Men solely depended upon the Belief of their Interpretations of it; as if the Bible was designed purely for the Use and Employment of the Learned, and the private Advantage and Benefit of the Priest. Ought it not to be clear and intelligible to the meanest Capacity? Could not its divine Author have so framed it? If the Salvation of all Mankind is centered in its Contents, should not its Contents be adapted to the Understanding of all Mankind? Ought Three-Fourths of the Body of Christians to be left in Ignorance of their Duty, and be given up, as it were, to be practised upon by religious Knaves and Enthusiasts? Who dares to think so unworthily of the supreme Being? He, who was so gracious to redeem Mankind, could not have thus limited and confined the Knowledge of the Redemption. The See of *Rome* is beholding to this Opinion for its Wealth and Grandeur: Artful and designing Men have always found their Account in propagating it: It is the Support of Enthusiasm, the Basis of Popery, the Prop of Presbyterianism, the Bulwark of Orthodoxy, but the Canker of Christianity.

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Would not the Wisdom of that State be justly questioned, who should enact Laws for the good Government thereof, which the Legislator only, not any of its Members, who were to observe them, understood? Duty must be known, before it can be practised. Laws of universal Obligation want not an Interpreter, and are not to be learnt from any; they speak for themselves. Can there be any greater Absurdity, than to talk in an unknown Language, and yet expect to be understood? But there is not any Thing so absurd, which hath not been, or will not be said by some of these Men.

How happens it, that they understand the Gospel in a better Light than others? Because, say they, *we have the Spirit of God*? Doth their Behaviour shew it? Do they teach none other but the pure and simple Doctrines of Christianity? Are they not endeavouring to set Reason and Religion at Variance? Their Words are incoherent, their Manner of speaking rude and violent, and their Discourses vague, indeterminate, and contradictory. What they deliver is so far from the least Pretension to the Work of Inspiration, that it is so void of common Sense as to excite our Pity, was it not for the Assurance and Confidence of the Speaker, which merit Contempt and Resentment.

ment. Can that be deemed the Dictates of the Holy Spirit, which Man could not utter without the greatest Absurdity, nor hear without expressing the warmest Indignation.

Are you for excluding all divine Aid? Do you think the Doctrine of divine Grace, assisting and co-operating with our Endeavours, to be absurd? Very far from it: The Doctrine itself is of ancient Date. *Homer* put his Heroes under the immediate Care and Protection of certain Deities. The Stoics considered the Fame and Reputation, acquired by their most eminent Men, not to have been wholly derived from personal Merit, but somewhat from the divine Assistance. The Doctrine, however, doth not depend for its Support upon Antiquity, that in many Things hath been frequently found erroneous. It is reasonable to think, that if there is a God, he should interest himself in the Behalf of the virtuous and the good, both in their temporal and spiritual Affairs: Such Interposition is not inconsistent with Reason, because neither injurious to the Liberty of Man, nor unbecoming of the Majesty of God. If we may be permitted to speak of the Deity by Way of Analogy, and suppose him to do to us, what we allow may be done by us to one another, such Assistance will appear to be reasonable and

and just. Every humane and generous Person is always ready to inform the ignorant, relieve the distressed, and point out to them those Things, which may prove dangerous, either to their Virtue, or their Happiness. If we may expect thus much from Man, and every good Man thus acts, have we not at least equal Reason to expect the same Tenderness and Compassion from a gracious and merciful God? But the Knowledge of our Salvation, as asserted, is not to be by an immediate and personal Revelation; that is plainly delivered in the Scriptures, and from them it is to be learned. The Performance also of the Conditions of Salvation depends not upon the Aid given to us by the Holy Spirit; for if we cannot act of ourselves, where would be the Praise of virtuous Deeds? What Reward would they be entitled to? Where would be the Crime of neglecting our Duty, if we had not the Ability to perform it? The Absurdity of these Opinions is so glaring, that it may be accounted somewhat absurd to have dwelt so long upon them. The Infatuation however amongst the People is so great, so catching, and so widely spreading, as to plead in Excuse.

It is asserted, *That it is sinful to pray for Health, Preservation, a comfortable Subsistence,*
and

and the Welfare and Happiness of ourselves and Families; that Prayers offered up for the Pardon of our Sins will only be heard.

In the Opinion of these Men we came into the World merely to pray and sing Psalms, and to spend our whole Time in religious Exercises: The Generality of Men will find something else to do, both with themselves, and their Time.

Why have I Senses and Appetites, if they are not to be pleased and satisfied? Why was I made, and placed in a World affording a vast Variety of Things for my Use, if they are not to be used? Why had I this Body, if it is not to be maintained and supported? If I was designed for a spiritual Life, why was I cloathed with this Flesh? Why was I not rather created an Angel?

Whilst in the Body its various Wants must be supplied, all Things, which this Life affords, may be procured and enjoyed, if procured with Innocence, and enjoyed with Temperance. To provide for our Household, to labour that we may eat, and to pray to God to prosper the Work of our Hands, are Duties natural and religious. To neglect Business, and the Care of our Families, for superfluous and unnecessary Prayers, is criminal and sinful. God requires Mercy before Sacrifice,
and

and no Act of Devotion is agreeable to him, which is accompanied with Injustice to Man.

Is it any Crime to be frequent in Acts of Devotion? Not in itself, but in its Consequences. Few Men are so wicked as to render it necessary, nor are our Sins of such a Nature as to oblige us to continual Intercessions for Pardon and Forgiveness. When Engagements in Life will permit, and Opportunities are present, we ought, and it is sinful not to frequent religious Assemblies, and to pay the Homage and Adoration due to the supreme Being; to express our Thankfulness for past Blessings, and to intreat a Continuance of them; to obtain a Remission of our former Sins, and implore the divine Assistance on our future Conduct. But what Piety, what Goodness, what Devotion, when by giving Attendance at Prayer an Act of Friendship may be omitted, or a Family Duty violated; when those may be neglected, whose Care ought to be our chief Concern, and for the Sake of maintaining a false Piety be exposed to Poverty and Want, their Education slighted, and left as a Prey to idle and loose Company: Such Prayers are impious, such Oblations cruel; no better than the offering up human Sacrifices to the Deity.

Prayer

Prayer is not required, and, if performed, is not commendable, nor praise worthy, but offensive and displeasing in the Sight of God, when it is to the Prejudice of Health, hurtful to Business, interferes with the Good of the Publick, or the Interest and Happiness of our Family. These Persons claim great Merit to themselves from a constant Attendance at Prayer; it is hoped, that such Behaviour will not be deemed sinful hereafter; and those who frequent religious Assemblies less, may not appear better Men, and better Christians, than those who are continually on their Knees at Prayers, and, like to some Heathens of old, stunning the Ears of their Gods with vain Repetitions of their pious Ejaculations, *whilst their domestick Concerns are neglected, their Families distressed, their Creditors defrauded, and themselves a Burden to the Parish, or supported at a private Expence, to the great Abuse and Disgrace of Charity.*

Persons of Fortune, or Leisure, who need not have Recourse to Labour, or be confined to Business for their Subsistence, may extend their religious Exercises to more than one Day in seven: It is not expected that others, who have not these Advantages, should extend them to more. To be too religious is as criminal, as to be too wordly minded. To follow our Profession,

Profession, or Calling, is as much a Part of our Duty, as to pray to or to praise God.

The Goodness of God to Man, and the Adoration he hath required of him, are fully declared in the Institution of the Sabbath. The trading, commercial, and laborious Part of Mankind makes about four fifths of Mankind; out of which Number the inferior or lower Sort make at least two Parts: These have various Wants and Necessities to relieve and supply. The Affairs of this World also require no inconsiderable Portion of Time to manage and transact. God, who knew this, and what Time was sufficient, hath appointed six Days out of seven for those Purposes. He therefore that follows his Devotions upon those Days, either to the Neglect or Prejudice of his temporal Affairs, is guilty of as great a Sin, as he that pursues either his Business or his Pleasure on the seventh Day, with an entire Disregard or Disuse of sacred Worship.

These Men have not only mistaken the Duty of Prayer, but also the necessary Observation of the Sabbath. Ought not this Day to be set apart for holy Service, and grateful Meditations upon the various divine Blessings received? Allowed. Should not therefore the loose and disorderly be compelled thus to observe it? No. For Acts of Religion to be meritorious,

meritorious, they must be voluntary. Piety, the Effect of Compulsion, hath no Virtue in it, merits no Praise, is entitled to no Reward. Should Men be permitted to take Pleasure, to buy and sell upon that holy Day? In Cases of Necessity, and under certain Restrictions, it is not unlawful so to do. After divine Service, wherein is the Offence *? What other Time hath the poor Artizan or Labourer with his Family to breath a little of the fresh Air? What is the Crime of innocently regaling himself, and them? Why should he be denied in itself a trifling Pleasure, to him indeed the greatest, as being the only one he can partake of? It is certainly a lesser Crime than sitting at Home, railing, censuring, exclaiming indiscriminately, judging severely, and condemning precipitately. To recriminate indeed is not an Extenuation of Guilt; Wickedness in another can neither palliate nor excuse it in me; but to reproach with Justice, we ourselves should be innocent: It shews a Want of Sense to attempt to correct another's Vice, when we are committing a greater ourselves. Undoubtedly there is less Sin in the cracking of a Nut, than in destroying a Neighbour's Reputation; and more of Goodness in tem-

* The Sale of Fruit and Liquors.

perately

perately gratifying the Appetites Abroad, than in indulging them at Home.

Angels may partake of none other than spiritual Enjoyments, their Nature rendering them unfit for any other Participation, and incapable of relishing sensual Pleasures. Men, who are differently made and formed, have Appetites to humour, and Senses that will and should be gratified : To indulge them is criminal, yet to please and satisfy them with a moderate Use of such Things, which are agreeable to their respective Natures, is not inconsistent with Reason, nor disallowed by Religion. It is Stoicism to make the Happiness of Man consist in Virtue only : If he was all Soul or Spirit, that Opinion would be just and true ; but whilst thus compounded, tho' Heaven he may regard as his ultimate Bliss, he cannot forget the Earth from whence he came, and will endeavour to make Provision, not for the Lusts of the Flesh, which is a Sin, but for the Wants of it, which is his Duty.

Monkish Austerities and Severities in so high Esteem in Countries subject to the Papacy, or a Stoical Contempt of this World, so greatly extolled, and seemingly recommended by the Practice of these gloomy and melancholy Protestants, do no Honour to the Author of our Being, who placed us here, and hath given liberally

berally of every Thing necessary for the Support and Enjoyment of this Life; nor is it any Proof of good Sense and a sound Understanding to add to the Miseries of Life, by refusing to accept of what may render it agreeable. There is neither Piety nor Merit in enduring Hardships and Afflictions, when they may be honestly avoided: These Things are not well pleasing to human Nature, though they may be submitted to and undergone from a View of Interest, or acquiring the Reputation of extraordinary Holiness, or on Account of a melancholy Disposition.

When the Veil is withdrawn from Christianity, which these Men by false Glosses and partial Representations have thrown over it, the better to support, uphold, and favour their own weak and narrow Way of thinking, it will be found a System, calculated as well for the present, as the future Good and Happiness of Mankind; it doth not require its Professors to turn Hermits, nor to abandon the Enjoyments of Life. But with them it is reckoned even criminal to smile: To seem pleasant and chearful, they treat as the Sign of a light and loose Disposition: The being seen at Places of Diversion and Entertainment, they look upon as nothing less than publicly renouncing of Christianity: Such Places they hold

hold in the greatest Detestation, and are loud and vehement in their Declamations against them, with little Justice to others, and no Merit to themselves.

A Man's Character is no more to be suspected by his being at a Playhouse, than at a Church: All are not Saints, who frequent the latter, nor are all to be accounted Sinners, who go to the former. If nothing is exhibited, that hath a Tendency to corrupt and vitiate the Morals, where is the Crime to partake of, where the Virtue to abstain from such Exhibitions? If any are injured, it may be imputed rather to a bad Disposition in themselves, than any Defect or Fault in the Entertainment. Players are no more to be condemned, because some of the Audience depart unimproved, than the Preacher censured, if some of his Congregation should go away unedified.

It is fit that there should be a Relaxation of the Mind, to carry off that Lowness and Dejection of Spirits, or to prevent those Disorders and Diseases, which the Fatigue of Business and Misfortunes in Life frequently bring upon us. The self Denial of these Men in the Pleasures of Life proceeds rather from Necessity, arising from a weak Constitution, slender Circumstances, or interested Views,

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than from the Want of Passion, Inclination, or Desire: It is no Virtue in them to condemn, or not to partake of them: They despise the World, because they have neither the Ability nor Capacity for enjoying the Things in it.

The true Contempt of the World consists, not in forbearing and giving up Pleasures, for which we have no Taste, nor Power of enjoying, but in forbearing and giving up Pleasures, which to enjoy, our Appetites being vehement, we might be prompted to exceed the Limits of Christian Liberty and human Prudence. I will venture to affirm, that those who partake of the various Pleasures of Life with Freedom, yet with Innocency and Moderation, are more generous, charitable, candid, honest, and less censorious, than those who hold them in Aversion, and, by a lowering Aspect and solemn Deportment, would fain pass upon the World for Men of extraordinary Piety and good Christians. Mistaken Men! The good Christian, if of a grave Appearance, is always of a chearful Spirit; no Melancholy is seen in his Countenance; his Behaviour is decent, not affected; his Conversation open and free, not dissembled, nor reserved; no Cloud of Dulness hangs upon his Looks, nor is his Speech morose; in Censure candid; in Re-
sentment

sentment flow; he thinketh no Evil, nor uttereth Words of Falsehood or Reproach *. Compare this Character with the Conduct of these Men, and from the Comparison determine concerning the Justness of their Pretensions to an extraordinary Piety and Goodness.

The Things of this Life, so long as we continue in it, must have some Weight with us: Nature teaches us to procure, what is necessary and convenient both for present and future Support; to avoid that which may prove a Trouble and Sorrow, and seek for what may be a Pleasure and a Comfort; to pursue those Methods that may best conduce to make us happy, and prevent our becoming miserable. Poverty is justly contemptible, and Riches desirable, when the one can be avoided, and the other procured with Equity and Industry; not that it is any Misfortune to be poor, nor any Crime to be rich, but when the former is occasioned through Folly and Extravagance, and the latter the Effect of Fraud and Deceit. The Poverty of a *Lazarus* had nothing of Merit in it, nor was the Wealth of *Dives* the

* The Christian is not, as represented by the Behaviour and the Appearance of some Persons, a dull, sour, and melancholy Fellow, nor uncivil and unpolite. What the World calls Politeness, he is indeed a Stranger to; for when he speaks, it is from Sincerity, not Courtesy: His Pleasures are innocent: He indulges himself not in any Folly, because he dreads even the Thought of offending Heaven, is unwilling to do an Injury to himself, or to debase the Dignity of his Nature.

Occasion of his Punishment : He would have been equally happy, had he been as innocent, and the other would have been equally miserable, had he been as guilty.

When the Scripture condemns Wealth and Power, it hath Respect only to their Abuse ; when it endeavours to raise in us a Disregard and Contempt for them, it is to prevent an Overfondness, lest they should occasion a Neglect of Duty, and by too much attending upon what is present, the future should be forgot. We may be great and wealthy, and yet religious. Riches may be acquired by honest Industry, and without Covetousness. A splendid Appearance may be made without Pride. Pleasures may be enjoyed free from Madness and Folly, and the Appetites regaled without transgressing the Rules of Temperance and Sobriety. A Prince on his Throne, invested with all the Pomp and Splendor of Royalty, may have as much Humility as the meanest of his Subjects : There may be as little Pride under the purple Attire, as in rustic Plainness and Simplicity : There may be as much Temperance at the Table of a Lord, as at a Beggar's. Gratitude to Heaven, for the various Blessings it is continually bestowing, may be as fully expressed by Acts of Beneficence, as Prayers, and our Duty

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as well discharged in the proper Use, as the so much boasted Contempt of worldly Things.

There is nothing blameable in the Possession of a fine Estate, neither is the Goodness of the Possessor lessened, if he doth not spend his Days in a continual Mortification and self Denial to bestow it upon the Poor, or to bequeath it at his Death to charitable Uses. It is not inconsistent with the Character of a Christian to procure, improve, and enjoy a Fortune. Dress, Equipage, and Living, according to the Quality and Circumstances of Persons, are neither disallowed, nor condemned by Religion. Distinctions amongst Mankind are in this Life necessary; since Men, though by Nature equal, are obliged, for the general Good of Society, to act different Parts, and to appear in different Characters.

Christianity doth not require its Professors to renounce, only to appear above the World; not to let Pleasure and Profit supersede their Obligations to the Practice of Virtue and Piety, but permits both Pleasure and Profit to be pursued, when they do not thus interfere. The World is an Inn, and its Inhabitants Travellers: If as Travellers we should not think of staying on the Road, but be hastening on to our Journey's End, yet as we walk along, we have a Right to make use of the

best Accommodations we meet with, and may innocently refresh, though not indulge ourselves by the Way.

The not distinguishing between loving and using this World hath been productive of very bad Consequences. Men of weak Understanding and a melancholy Disposition, from the unworthy and unjust Representation given of Christianity, as strictly requiring us to renounce the Things of this Life, and to devote all our Time to prepare for and secure the next, have looked upon it as highly meritorious to torment themselves, not only by abstaining from every kind of Pleasure, but even refusing common Necessaries; no such Things are required of us by our Religion. He that made Man, knew that he had Passions and Appetites to be gratified: Whilst in the Body bodily Refreshment and Nourishment must be had. It is not easy to determine, which of the two is the greatest Sinner, whether he who knowingly impairs his Health by abstaining from innocent Recreations, or he that destroys it by an excessive Indulgence in them: All Things were created for our Good: A sullen Disuse therefore seems to be as criminal, as a bold Abuse of them.

These deluded Men had better imitate the Example, than observe the Precepts of their Preachers,

Preachers ; who, though they labour greatly in spiritualizing of others, are so just to Nature and themselves, as not only to partake of the Comforts and Enjoyments, but even the Delicacies of Life ; who warmly recommend Abstemiousness to their Followers, the better to support, we fear, Licentiousness in themselves.

Others boldly assert, *That unless we are assured of being saved, we must be damned.* Doth not this Opinion tend to make the humble Christian desperate, the wicked confident ? The former, from a Sense of his many Imperfections, will not be so high minded to be assured, though he hath good Hope of his Salvation : The latter, the Alternative being disagreeable, will embrace it, because he hath none other Way left to allay the Terrors of a guilty Conscience, and ward off the just Vengeance of an incensed Deity.

If a Man considers this Life, what it really is, a State of Trial and Discipline ; that his Virtue is beset with various Temptations ; that he may be surpris'd into Sin ; that the most prudent, circumspect, and watchful have their unguarded Moments ; he will be far from entertaining *an absolute Assurance.* If the Scriptures call upon us, *To work out our Salvation with Fear and Trembling ;* admonish us, *Not to be*

high minded, but fear ; and advises, That he who thinketh he standeth, should take heed lest he falls ; we must look upon such an Assurance to be vain.

How is this Knowledge of Salvation acquired ? Is it by Revelation of the Spirit ? Who are the Persons worthy of this Revelation ? The good and the pious ; they only are entitled to, and can partake of this divine Blessing : Will they say that they enjoy it ? They, from a Sense of the Errors, Mistakes, and Follies human Nature is subject to, detest the aspiring and presumptuous Thought. What Necessity is there for such a peculiar Revelation ? Are not the Scriptures plain and clear concerning the Conditions of our future Salvation ? And every Man knows, when he doth or doth not fulfil them : When he doth, he is in a State of Salvation, yet not absolutely secure of it, because he may fall from his Integrity ; in Death alone is Security. So long as Men continue in this World, they are liable to commit Sin, and consequently their Assurance of Salvation cannot be positive ; if they could be perfectly holy, and above the Power of every Temptation, the Doctrine would be true : This no Man ever hath been, Christ excepted, nor ever will be.

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There is however a partial, though not a positive Assurance of Salvation ; this the good possess, whilst they retain their Integrity, and the penitent, if they continue in Obedience, which by Folly they may both forfeit. Without this Assurance what Comfort and Consolation could the good Man receive more than the Sinner ? Is there no Difference between him who serveth God, and him who serveth him not ? Must the same Hopes, the same Fears, agitate both ? This is no greater Assurance than the virtuous Heathen possessed, who was conscious to himself of Happiness, if there was a future State, because he had endeavoured to deserve it. Is it unreasonable to suppose the Christian to have the same Consciousness ? For whom are the Joys of Heaven reserved ? Will they not be the Portion of the Righteous ? And can any one be so much a Stranger to himself, as not to know by his Actions, whether he shall be entitled to them ? Is it not from this Expectation of Happiness, that good Men are enabled patiently to endure the Cares and Troubles of Life, and willingly to give up the false Pleasures and Enjoyments of the World ? But is there any Man that sinneth not ? Is not then this Assurance vain ? No. All Men are Sinners in some Degree, yet all are not infamously

mously and presumptuously so. Sins of Indiscretion and Surprise differ widely from Acts of Licentiousness and Profligacy, from premeditated and abandoned Wickedness: Those who do not incur the Guilt of the latter, have this Assurance.

The Knowledge of this Assurance, as well as the Doctrine itself, varies greatly from the Opinion of these Men: It is not founded on inward Illuminations, or divine Communications of the Spirit, (which they know not how to distinguish from the Operations of their own Spirit) but on the Approbation and Testimony of Conscience, a self Applause, arising from a Conviction of having observed the divine Laws with as pure and upright an Heart, as it is possible for weak and frail Nature to do: This is not Presumption, it is no more than what the Gospel hath afforded to all those, who obey its Precepts in Truth and Sincerity.

Others there are, *who exclaim against and condemn the Use of Reason in Revelation, assert that the Word of God is not Matter proper for human Inquiry, and that it ought to be received without examining into the Reasonableness of its Doctrines, and the Evidence by which it is supported.*

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By thus raising the Credit of the sacred Writings, and forbidding free Inquiry, they keep their Hearers ignorant, and by that Means propagate their Errors with Success. The Remembrance (may it never be forgotten, nor obliterated !) of what our Ancestors suffered through implicit Faith, should prevail with us not to give up our Reason, but to use it for these good Purposes, *The Discovery of Truth, and the Detection of Error.*

Popery, with its absurd Doctrines and slavish Impositions, would never have continued so many Centuries, nor been supported and upheld at the Expence of so much Blood and Treasure, had not this Doctrine prevailed, had not Credulity been recommended and received as a Precept of the Christian Religion. It is hoped therefore, to prevent the Return of Popery, and to check the Growth of Enthusiasm, that this slavish Doctrine, now reviving, may be treated with the Contempt it justly deserves ; and that the Time will never come, when Men shall believe Christianity to be true, without inquiring how it is so.

God hath made us reasonable Creatures : Our blessed Lord and his Apostles have treated us as such in their Writings and Discourses : They have requested us to prove, to search, and examine into the Reasonableness of their Doctrines,

Doctrines, and the Truth of Christianity : It is highly necessary we should, that our Faith might be built upon a good Foundation, our Hope in the Promise of God sure, and we might be upon our Guard against the Arts of cunning Men, who always lie in wait to deceive.

If Christianity cannot stand the Test of Reason, it is a Religion of no Authority. Every one concerned for the Glory and Honour of the supreme Being ought to declare against and expose it, and Mankind should be taught some other Way to Happiness. When Arguments from Reason fail, or are defective, it is Time to abolish Christianity, and to seek for or invent some new Religion. If it is their Zeal for the Authority of the sacred Writings, that is the Cause of their depreciating human Reason, it is neither commendable, nor just : For how are they, or we, to be assured of their divine Authority, but by bringing it before the Tribunal of Reason ? Trying Opinions, whether they be from God, can no more be said, *opposing Revelation*, than the discrediting modern Pretensions to Inspiration, *denying Inspiration*. We ought to submit our Reason to the divine Will, yet we should be first well assured that it is so. The best Advocates and Friends of Christianity

Christianity have been those, who have searched deeply into the Truth of Things, and credited nothing without a previous Examination. Reason never made an Infidel. The Abuse and Neglect of it have been the Occasion of many Errors and much Superstition, established Popery, and rendered Enthusiasm successful. Who can say indeed to the Almighty, why hast thou done this? However, every Person may lawfully and innocently consider, in order to think justly and truly, the Consistency of it with his Notions of the divine Attributes *.

These

* The Study of natural as well as moral Philosophy, and indeed every Kind of Learning but what is sacred, hath been censured and condemned by some of the Preachers belonging to this Sect. The Apostle, who hath been quoted against it, was of a different Opinion, by drawing from it the best and strongest Argument in Favour of the Reasonableness and Possibility of a Resurrection. Natural Philosophy affords a vast Variety of noble and beautiful Proofs in Support of revealed Religion, and in Confirmation of a Providence. By the Study of Nature Men were led to the Knowledge, and firmly fixed in the Belief of a God. Every Branch of Literature, every Art and Science, may be not only made, but do certainly tend, to entertain and improve the Mind. If Learning is abused, should it therefore be banished out of the World? The Abuse of any Thing cannot cancel the Use of it. If so, what would become of Religion; for the Obligation to observe and practice it would be void, since it hath been frequently applied to countenance and vindicate the vilest and most infamous Purposes. If some Men have prostituted their Parts to serve iniquitous Designs, hath not Learning been, and may it not still be, of considerable Benefit and Advantage to Society? The Study of the Scriptures is certainly our Duty, and our principal Duty: But other Studies are not to be neglected; they are as necessary for our well Being

These several Opinions are propagated with great Heat and Passion, by Men of more Zeal than Knowledge, of more Learning than Judgment, too much read in Religion, and too little in human Nature; who tell us, what they would have Men to be, not what the Scriptures require us to be, what in Reason we ought to be, nor what Nature intended we should be. It cannot appear strange, that such Opinions should be propagated and received; the human Mind is capable of any Deception, and of admitting the greatest Absurdity; besides, the People of these Times are, like the *Athenians* of old, fond of any new Thing. It is not difficult to find Men bold enough to publish, and others weak enough to admit any Thing. There never will be wanting Innovators, so long as Innovations can be made profitable.

The Propagators of these Opinions may be honest and sincere, yet they seem to be much wanting in Modesty and Prudence; they profess the highest Regard and Veneration for Religion, but they need not to be told, that

ing here, as the other is to secure our Happiness hereafter. For what are Men endued with different Capacities, but to supply the several particular Wants of Society? The Study of Nature will rather destroy, than advance Infidelity. If Infidels object to Religion, as containing Things mysterious, in Nature there are many Things equally astonishing and unaccountable, yet credible, to remove the Objection.

Innovations

Innovations in religious Matters are apt to render its Authority suspected, and to weaken its Influence. And would not any one, unless vainly puffed up with his own Learning, be inclined to distrust his own Judgment, when it contradicted others of equal, if not superior Merit, Piety, and Learning? Not that their Opinions are to be implicitly received; but they deserve to be candidly and impartially considered, before they are given up, opposed, and ridiculed.

What is the End proposed by these Preachers *? Is it to comfort the Sinner, and make him sensible of his Follies? Is it to display the Excellency of Religion, and its various Blessings, which he hath set at nought, and by his vicious Practices rendered himself unworthy of? Is it to dispose his Mind to Seriousness, and gradually to lead him to Repentance? Is it to convince his Reason and Un-

* They have been the Occasion of much Scandal to the Christian Profession, by encouraging a great Number of Laymen, many of whom are the Refuse of the People, or the meanest of Mechanics, to assume the ministerial Office, and bellow out in the Lanes and Alleys of the City their wild Notions, in a Language rude, irrational, unintelligible. If, as they pretend, they have an high Veneration for the sacred Character, should they not discountenance and condemn the Presumption of such Persons, who, by their licentious Manner of speaking, are both dangerous and hurtful to the Peace and good Order of Society, cannot be of the least Benefit to Religion, and must render their Cause much more ridiculous and contemptible.

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derstanding of the Folly and Wickedness of Sin, and so to display the Terrors of the Lord, as not to drive him to Madness or Despair? Is such the Method of their Preaching? Is such the Consolation afforded to Sinners? Is it not the Reverse of this? Visit their Places of Worship, and see.

Here sits Melancholy, there Despair. Sighs and Groans are heard from one Corner, frightful and hideous Looks are seen at another. The Words of some speak Assurance of their Salvation, and an uncommon Familiarity with their Maker, whilst others are overwhelmed with an horrible Dread of eternal Damnation. Is this the Design of the Christian Religion to afflict and torment Mankind? Is it to make Man miserable and wretched? Certainly not. When under the Conviction of Guilt, is not Religion to comfort him? When oppressed with the Weight of his past Crimes, is it not to give him Ease? Is it not to administer Balm to the wounded Conscience, and to refresh him, who is weary with the Burden of his Sins? Is not this to deal with us as reasonable Creatures? Doth not this Treatment shew God to be a merciful and gracious Being? If Religion cannot comfort, even the most wicked, when turning from the Evil of his Ways, of what Benefit is it to Man? If

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its Intention is not to make Man happy both here and hereafter, of what Use is it to him? To what Purpose doth it exhort the wicked to repent, if, when repenting, it fills their Minds with Doubts, destroys their inward Peace, or deprives them of their Reason? But such is not the Christian Religion. Its Invitation to Sinners is gracious, *Come unto me all that travel and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you.* Its Encouragement great, *The blotting out even the Remembrance of past Sins.* Its Promises are comfortable, *The Holy Spirit to co-operate with them in the future Discharge of their Duty, and everlasting Happiness the Reward.* The Conditions of Acceptance easy, *An hearty and sincere Repentance with Faith in Christ.*

Is this a pious Regard for the Souls of Men to drive them into a State of Despondency? If this is preaching the Gospel of Christ, much rather had I preach for ever without the least Benefit to the Hearer, than by Preaching to occasion one Sinner to despair of his Salvation. They have been of Use, it is said, in reclaiming several vicious and profligate People. The good done falls exceeding short of the Evil, that their Schism hath been productive of, *in the mean and unworthy Opinion some have from thence entertained*

I

tained of Religion, the strange Perversion of sacred Truths, the Contempt shewn to them, the Uneasiness it hath created in the Minds of serious People, the bad Practices it hath given Birth to, and the melancholy Effects it hath had upon many of their Followers.

What Advantage can it be to Society or Religion to lessen Mens Obligations to the Practice of Virtue and Piety? Let the Preaching of Morality be accounted a dry, it is an useful Subject, and the Times are bad enough to prove it necessary; it can never be too much inculcated: The Example of our Saviour is sufficient Authority for it: In Imitation of him we cannot err: His Discourses were principally moral. When he exhorted Men to believe, he recommended also the Practice of moral Virtue. The Disciples followed their Master, and urged the Necessity of Faith, Repentance, and a good Life to be a Christian. The best Proof to be given of our Faith is, to shew forth its Power in a pious and sober Behaviour; and, as the Holy Spirit hath fully and plainly revealed our Duty, to live agreeable to it, and not wait for nor expect any extraordinary Illumination and visionary Inspiration, which on that Account are made unnecessary. If Morality was to be preached, or set up in Opposition to Christianity,

nity, as procuring Salvation exclusive of the Merits of Christ, they and all Christians might, and not unjustly, exclaim against such a Doctrine, and such Preachers.

As the End of Christianity is to make us good, that we may be happy, Morality cannot be too much insisted on, and inculcated. These Men, it is believed, avoid such Discourses, because it is a difficult, not an easy Task to execute. For here we have the Passions, the Prejudices, the Lusts of Mankind to encounter with. We are not only to eradicate vicious Habits, but to beget, in those who have been long accustomed to hate, a Love of Virtue. We are to enter as it were into the very Hearts of Men, to trace the secret Springs of Vice through all its dark and mazy Windings, and to address them in a Language that may make them neither desperate, nor presumptuous: A Work this full of Labour and Difficulty. It is far more easy to convince a Man of the Truth of Christianity, than to make him a good Christian. In the former Respect, Reason is the Judge, in the latter, his Vices.

It is somewhat extraordinary in the Conduct of these Men, to pretend to a particular Esteem and Veneration for the Tenets and Doctrines of the established Church, and to

assert, that they alone abide by its Articles, yet hold separate Conventicles, in Opposition to Church Government. It is not we, as pretended, but their strange Opinions that have excluded them out of our Churches : Being sensible of the private Advantages arising from the Schism, they are not disposed to return. Supposing their leaving the Church to have been from Principle, the Error, if seen into, is now become too lucrative to abandon it. How opposite to their Profession is their Behaviour ? If their Regard for the Church of *England* is sincere, why did they depart, or deviate from it ? Why do they not conform ? If they had the true Interest of Christianity at Heart, why did they not, before they withdrew themselves, freely submit their Opinions to publick Disquisition ? There were not wanting Clergy, Men of Learning, Piety, and Candor, who would have gladly embraced the Opportunity of convincing them of their Error, or being convinced themselves. It would also have been more decent and regular to have acquainted their Diocesane with their Doubts and Scruples. Information was not what they wanted, and Contradiction they could not submit to.

However just their Censure of some of the Clergy, who reap where they have not sown,
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eat of the Fruit without labouring in the Vineyard, notwithstanding they are more diligent and laborious, they are equally, though not alike blameable. Can there be any greater Oppression and Injustice than to take from such, whose Want and Poverty render the smallest Arms acceptable and comfortable? If this is not, what is *grinding the Faces of the Poor*? The various and affecting Reports concerning the private and publick Collections made, with the Frauds committed by the Givers, and Family Distresses consequent thereupon, may be partly true, partly false: To a sensible and humane Person they may therefore seem as idle Tales, invented and propagated through Envy and Malice. As the Suspicions of Abuse in these Matters are strong, and Complaints loud and frequent, the Publick, though it hath no Right to demand, may expect from the great *Disinterestedness* of these Preachers, that they will clear themselves from this Imputation; their Cause cannot suffer from a Declaration *.

The Claim to Inspiration equally with the Apostles is unjust and unnecessary. We of these Times have not the Prejudices to encounter with, as the Apostles had, nor the

* The putting off such an Account to the Day of Judgment favours not of godly Honesty and Sincerity.

same Defects to supply by such an extraordinary Gift: They were weak, unlearned, of slender Abilities, without Parts natural or acquired, and from their Occupations may be judged to have been very ignorant. To render such Instruments useful in the Propagation of Christianity, there was an absolute Necessity for a supernatural Aid; but not for the present Ministers of the Gospel, who are not so deficient in the Qualifications requisite for the Discharge of their Office; whose Business is not so much to make Converts to Christianity, as to press its important Truths upon the Consciences of Men. Men are to be admonished of, and perswaded to live agreeable to their Duty, not to have made known to them what it is; to have illustrated and explained the Faith professed, not to be exhorted to believe.

There doth not appear to be any immediate Want of this extraordinary Power, even for the Conversion of those who have not embraced Christianity. The Ability and Learning of the Missionaries, with the Assistance given by States professing the Christian Faith, are found sufficient: There was a Necessity for it to the Apostles, who had neither Assistance, nor such Qualifications; their Business was to establish a Religion no where received,
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and every where spoken against and persecuted : Of these to propagate a Religion for many Centuries established, and generally approved of : A divine Assistance was proper to carry on the Design of the former, human Attainments with the divine Blessing will suffice for the latter.

Deism it is true prevails : The Writers in Favour of that Cause have been not a little successful : The Elegancy of Stile, the Purity of the Language, with an easy insinuating Manner of Expression, have misled many ; and a Willingness and a Disposition in others to be deceived, have contributed much to raise the Credit, and extend the Influence of their Writings. Sentiment hath been received for Argument, bold Assertions been taken for Proofs, and the Sallies of Imagination have passed for rational and sober Disputation ; for the Cure of Deism this extraordinary Inspiration however is not wanted. The Authority of Christianity is firm and unshaken by its admirable Defences, in which the Powers of Genius and Learning are exerted and displayed, equal, at least, to those of its Adversaries.

If we judge of the Inspiration of these Persons from their Actions, when they pretend to be under the divine Influence, *their Weakness* must greatly surprise us. What whining,

simpering, canting, brawling, scolding; what horrid Distortions of Body and Agonies of Mind; what a Mixture of Threatnings and Consolations, of Cursings and Blessings, so contrary to that Love, Goodness, and Gentleness, which are the Characteristicks of the Spirit; what a tremendous Display of the Artillery of Heaven and Hell, with perpetual Thunderings of eternal Damnation, so dreadful as to terrify even the very elect; what bold and confident Expressions of inward Feelings of *Jesus Christ*, accompanied with Looks and Ravings, Emblems not of Soberness, so opposite to the meek and humble Spirit of the Saviour of Mankind. How can these Things be accounted the Operations and Workings of the Holy Spirit of God?

The declaiming against Vice and Folly is commendable; but the exclaiming against the Age, as the most profligate and abandoned, flowing from an intemperate Zeal, is dishonest, because not true. It hath its Vices, and those of dangerous Tendency, as Luxury and Extravagance, and their bad Effects, Fraud, Rapine, and Violence are too visible. Though we cannot boast of our Virtues, we are not so bad as these Men would represent, compared with the preceding Age; and it is hoped, when the Blessing of Peace is obtained, we shall

shall become better. That we may not be accused with them of asserting without proving, let the following Instances suffice to shew, that little as the Superiority is, the present hath more of Virtue and Goodness than the former Age.

Have we now any of those Places, once so numerous, of private Entertainment* : There the Youth of both Sexes met, and were guilty of Indecencies not fit to be mentioned, which corrupted their Morals, and ruined their Constitution.

Those large Plats of waste Ground, which were both a Nuisance and a Terror to the Neighbourhood, the grand Nurseries of Vagabonds and Thieves, where the incautious and unexperienced Youth was early trained up to Idleness, Knavery, and Gaming, where Passengers could not walk with Safety of their Persons, nor their Property, are now inclosed, and become Places of Security and Elegance †.

The Houses of Diversion, where Youth most vilely mispent their Time, and were excited and encouraged to Debauchery, Riot and Drunkenness, are happily, for the public Peace and Welfare, suppressed ‡.

* Hops.

† Laid out into Squares.

‡ Wells.

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The Suppression of a favourite Diversion amongst the common People, which was to be met with almost at every publick House, both within and without the City Walls, at which they spent whole Days with the Fruits of their Labours, to the great Prejudice of their Master's Business, and the Distress of their own Families, hath contributed to restore the Spirit of Industry and Sobriety amongst them *.

Need the good Effects be mentioned which have flowed from the Prohibition of spirituous Liquors? Do we now see, as before the Prohibition, so much Drunkenness, Poverty, and Wretchedness amongst the lower Sort? Are they not more sober, more cleanly, more healthy, more inclined to work, less riotous and quarrelsome, and their Offspring not so weak, nor sickly? Before it could we walk the Streets of the City, especially its Suburbs, without frequently meeting with, or seeing what must have excited our Pity and Detestation, Objects covered with Rags, and wallowing in Filth and Nastiness.

Hath not the Destruction of that grand Mystery of Iniquity †, wherein under a Mask and Veil the greatest Indecencies were carried

* Skettle Alleys.

† Masquerades.

on, contributed something towards restoring good Order and Decorum amongst the Great?

The Diffolution of Party, which if it did not encourage, connived at, if it did not support, would not punish the Vices of its Friends, hath considerably advanced the Cause of Virtue.

There is also a publick Virtue, which it would be unpardonable to pass by unnoticed, that is, *universal Charity*. There is scarce a Disorder or Disease, whether of Body or Mind, but what hath a Place of Refuge or Relief to flee unto, where the afflicted, the unfortunate, and the unhappy may meet with Comfort in their various Distresses, a Remedy for their Diseases, and a Cure for their Follies.

To talk, as some of these Men do, of absolute Holiness, is absolute Nonsense: To aim at Perfection, is attempting to compass an Impossibility. Unsinning Obedience is a Subject both pleasing and heavenly to think upon, but cannot be exemplified in Practice: What the pious wish that they could pay; what the proud and conceited think may be paid; how vain the Thought: Can they be insensible of the Infirmities of human Nature? Will they say, that they are superior to every Temptation; that they never entertained

tained one vicious Desire, never conceived, nor did wrong ? This Character may be attained by Beings of an immortal Nature, not by so frail, so ignorant, so weak a Creature as Man : He hath numberless Imperfections to humble his Pride, and render Boasting vain : The brightest Character being not without a Blemish. Men celebrated for their Piety and Goodness, even the reputed Friends of God, have erred, have greatly erred, laboured under many Weaknesses, and been guilty of no little Crimes.

If to obtain eternal Happiness we must be perfect, even as our heavenly Father is perfect, no Man can be saved, for no Man ever hath been innocent, pure from all Manner of Sin. If such Perfection could be attained, of what Use the Merits of Christ ? What Necessity for his Death ? To abstain from wilful, deliberate, and presumptuous Sins, is in the Power of every Man ; but to be absolutely free from all Manner of Sin, is not in the Power of any Man. We are to do all the good we can with Honesty and Sincerity : To think that such Endeavours can be free from Defects, is contrary to Experience ; and to imagine that Man can be pure as his Creator, is little short of Blasphemy.

This

This Doctrine of Perfection is the Parent of spiritual Pride : The Persons who suppose themselves to have arrived at it, consider themselves as God's Elect, the peculiar Favourites of Heaven ; look upon all other Men as Sinners, and hold them in the greatest Contempt and Aversion. If they are not deficient in Holiness, without which no Man shall see the Lord, they certainly are in Charity, without which no Man can please the Lord ; so that whatever account they themselves may make of their Righteousness, in his Sight it will appear no better than filthy Rags.

Most of the Followers of these Novelists will be found upon Inquiry, such who have never examined into the Truth and Reasonableness of their Assertions : They, struck with their uncommon Manner, and entertaining an high Opinion of their Ability and Character, of their Integrity and Veracity, have confided in them, and implicitly admitted all to be Gospel which they have delivered. Of this Sort are the common People, who are generally determined by Appearances, and very susceptible of false Impressions, being incapable, for Want of a proper Education, of discovering and detecting the subtle Disguise in which Falsehood lies concealed.

Others

Others, who have enquired, will appear to have been first prejudiced in their Favour, and by a mean and servile Compliment to the Understanding of these Teachers, did not so much consider, how far their Assertions are consistent with Scripture, as endeavoured to make Scripture consistent with their Assertions.

Many more have been determined to receive their Doctrines from the Example of those Followers among them, who are distinguished for their Learning or their Wealth, thinking by this Means to acquire a Reputation of Consequence and Importance to themselves; from hence Error springs, becomes successful, and is supported. It is not therefore strange, that Men, making no Use of their Reason and Understanding, should adopt Falsehood for Truth, and when adopted, should obstinately persist in it, from a Fear of having their Judgment suspected. Those who have doubted, have kept clear of these popular Errors: And whoever would be free from Error and Delusion, and is desirous of coming at the Knowledge of Truth, must doubt: So long as Things are taken for granted upon the mere Assertion of the Speaker, it is Matter of Wonder that there are not more Sects in Religion.

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It requires no great Capacity to understand the Method of Salvation laid down in the Scriptures. Christianity is a plain and simple System ; in it is contained what hath been done for us, and what is necessary to be done by us to obtain it ; its Laws want not to be explained, but enforced : Every Man who can read, may, without an Interpreter, understand them. He that endeavours to observe his Saviour's Commands therein delivered, and relies upon his Merits for the Expiation of his Sins, takes the best Method of becoming a good Man and a true Christian ; and he that is so, hath found the best and safest Way to be saved, will live with Comfort, end his Days in Peace, and be eternally happy.



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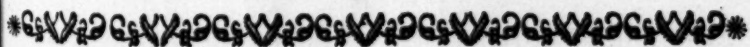
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A
VINDICATION
OF THE
JUSTICE AND GOODNESS OF GOD
FROM
POPULAR PREJUDICES.



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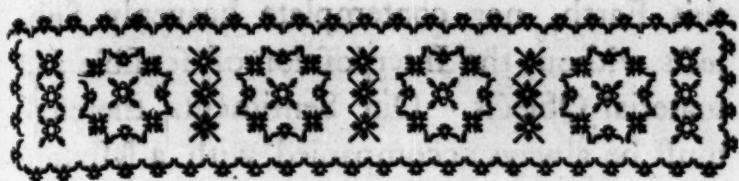
JUSTICE AND COURTESY OF GOD

NOTES AND PREJUDICES

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A
VINDICATION
OF THE
JUSTICE AND GOODNESS OF GOD
FROM
POPULAR PREJUDICES.

 HAT the Almighty hath declared
of himself, *That his Thoughts are not
our Thoughts, nor his Ways our Ways,*
Reason must assent to the Truth of. The
Operations of a Being of a Nature so distinct
from our own must be unknown, and without
the Assistance of Revelation are not to be de-
scribed with any Certainty. Weak Man in-
deed is apt to think and speak of the Deity
in the same Manner as of himself, though he
allows that he cannot be such a one as him-
self. We cannot raise our Thoughts above
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this Earth, nor contemplate heavenly Subjects without the Interposition of sensible and material Objects. Our Sentiments therefore must be always accompanied with a Mixture of Imperfection, and will be frequently erroneous and unjust.

To this our Inability and Incapacity of judging of heavenly Things as they really are, the Language of the Scriptures is properly adapted; wherein God is said to have the like Passions with us, as Anger, Hatred, Love, Pity; and bodily Parts, as Hands, Arms, &c. The Reason of it is the absolute Impossibility of our conceiving or expressing any Notion of a pure spiritual Being, his Properties, and Attributes, without the Mediation of the Senses. The Scriptures, however, have sufficiently guarded against any Misconceptions of the divine Nature, tho' they have accommodated the Description of it to the Powers of the human Understanding, by declaring God to be *a Spirit*, unlike to the Representation made of him by Idols, whom no Man hath seen, and of whom no Similitude can be made.

Conscious of these Truths, with what Humility and Reverence ought we to speak of the Deity? When we cannot discover the Reasons for any particular Dispensations of
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his Providence, should we not ascribe it to the Weakness of our own Intellect, and not entertain the injurious Thought, that he, in whom all Perfection dwelleth, can err or do wrong? If Things should be ordered according to our Wishes, could we say, as we have not the Gift of foreseeing Consequences, that we were right? We should therefore look upon the present Situation of Things to be the best, and that all Things concur, though moved and impelled by different and contrary Causes, to advance and promote the Good of the whole.

There are many Things that we understand not, and cannot have Demonstration for, which we believe and receive as true: Such are contained in the Records of ancient Times, and daily Occurrences, of which we have no personal Knowledge, and entirely depend upon the Credit and Veracity of those who report or relate them. The grand fundamental Truth, which is the Basis of natural Religion, and the Support of Virtue, *the Being of a God*, though admitted, is not understood by us. How he exists, and what his Nature and Perfections are, we can neither conceive nor know. If therefore it is a Weakness to believe every Thing, without an Inquiry into its Fitness and Reasonableness, it is not less

imprudent to reject any Thing, because every Circumstance of its Truth may not be clearly known to, or comprehended by us.

Whatever Difficulties may occur, in considering either the Doctrines of Christianity, the Scheme of Man's Redemption, or God's moral Government of the World, we should impute them to some Defect in ourselves, and not rashly censure the divine Wisdom. If we are not sceptically inclined, and have no secret Prejudice against Religion, we shall not complain of a Want of sufficient Reason for believing it. When from the Nature of the Thing itself, or our own Incapacity, a full and satisfactory Knowledge cannot be obtained, we may safely admit it to be true, from a just Presumption that a wise and gracious Being will deliver nothing unworthy of himself, nor require Assent to what is ridiculous and absurd: He can have no Design in deceiving or imposing upon us, our Happiness being the End of his revealing himself unto us. If then we are satisfied with the Authority of Revelation, we may safely believe its Contents; for it cannot contain any Thing that is false, nor deliver any Thing contrary to sound Reason.

If before we admitted a Thing to be true, we waited for and expected Demonstration,
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our Knowledge would be little, and our Ignorance great: We should meet with few Satisfactions of this Sort. There are many Beings in the Garden of Nature, whose Existence indeed is known to us, but their various Operations and Properties, with the several Causes producing them, are concealed from us. Of many Things, after all the Searches and Researches, we obtain at best an indistinct and imperfect Knowledge, both uncertain and unsatisfactory.

Need we range abroad to see for Difficulties, to humble the Pride and Conceit of human Wisdom? When we look into ourselves, we are, as in a Maze, lost and confounded. How arduous, if not impracticable, the Task to describe the various, distinct, and mutual Operations of Body and Spirit. The Nature of the latter, and the Manner of its Co-existence with the former, who can clearly set forth? Hence its Immateriality hath been denied, its Immortality disputed, and even its Being doubted of. It becometh us therefore to allow of and believe God's various Dealings with us to be both fit and equitable; not presuming to direct how Things should have been done, but admitting whatever hath been done to have been rightly done: It is a sufficient Reason for believing it, *that God*

did it. If what hath been revealed, neither contains nor implies an Absurdity, and is supported by proper Authority, its Truth must be acknowledged. If Difficulties arise in the Scriptures, which seem to be irreconcilable with the Notions we have entertained, or they have given us of the Deity, let us remember, to avoid thinking injuriously or speaking presumptuously of him, that he neither thinks nor acts as we do. This will be illustrated by divers Instances, wherein his Justice and Goodness will be vindicated, and the Weakness and Wickedness of the Prejudices entertained by the Enemies of Revelation and of Virtue shewn.

Concerning the Fall of Man Reason will ask, *How a Being of infinite Wisdom, who knew that the Creatures he had made would transgress, did not sufficiently provide against it : Or, how a Being of infinite Goodness, who foreknew the Consequences of such Transgression, should not have interposed and prevented it ?*

These Questions naturally arise from considering and reflecting upon the divine Attributes. We are all sensible that there is much Evil in the World, and that Man, though born pure from Sin, soon falls into it, and his Morals are quickly corrupted, notwithstanding the

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the greatest Care taken, and Diligence used, to preserve them. How to reconcile these Things with one another is the Difficulty.

God is a merciful Being, yet Man is unhappy. The Creator is a Being of perfect Holiness and Goodness, yet his Creatures are ungodly and wicked. Shall we say that we were thus made? We dare not. God made Man upright: He designed him for a State of Happiness, otherwise he would never have been made; for that Purpose was Reason given him: The right or wrong Application of it was left in his own Power. The Misery he feels, he brings on himself; the inevitable Consequence of Reason unexerted, Passion unrestrained, and of Appetites unlawfully indulged.

But could not this Misery have been diverted by the great Author of our Being? That it could, must be allowed to be true*; that it ought, doth not seem to be equally true, because the present Appearance of Things is against it. Numerous are the Follies committed, and very affecting the Consideration of that Wretchedness they have brought upon

* God can prevent the Commission of Sin, or he may freely, without any Satisfaction given, pardon it, when committed. for his Power is unlimited and uncontroulable: But neither of these Acts can be done consistent with his Attributes, or the Nature of Man.

Mankind.

Mankind. What is the Object of a Man's Pity and Commiseration, cannot be passed over with Indifference and Unconcern by the Deity. Relief would certainly have been administered, if it had been equally consistent with his Attributes, as it was in his Power to have given it.

The Idolatry which had so long prevailed amongst the polite and refined Nations, and which at this Time subsists amongst the rude and barbarous, with the various Impurities and Immoralities occasioned or countenanced by that false Mode of Worship, would have been long since extinguished, as the Being and Honour of the Deity was and is so highly concerned, if the Thing itself had been fit and proper to have been done. The Time most seasonable for God's Interposition is known only to himself. If Man had been permitted to have fallen into Sin and Wickedness, without any Prospect of being released from it, or of procuring the Pardon of his Crimes, though the Creature could not have said to his Creator, *Why didst thou form me thus?* He might have justly wished, *That the Day of his Birth had been the Day of his Death; that he had never been conceived; or that he had perished before he had seen the Light:* Such is not his Condition

dition. God is loving and gracious, unworthy as we are : Though undeserving of his Mercies, he offers to every Sinner, upon a sincere Repentance, a full Pardon of all his Sins, and promises to reward the future Amendment of his Life with everlasting Bliss and Glory. What more could Man have wished for or desired ? Though he hath been wicked, he need not give himself up to Despair, for he is not abandoned to Misery. Cease we then from Complaints against the Condition of our Being ; not to our Freedom, or Abuse of it, but to Obstinacy and Impenitency our future Misery is to be ascribed. Have we sinned, and do we repent ? God graciously condescends to forgive. Have we sinned, and will not repent ? God will punish us. Do we merit Forgiveness, if we will not ask for it ?

But did not God know that Man would transgress the Law given ? Should he not then have remitted the Penalty due to it, or have fixed none ? No. Unless the Powers we have are used, would they not have been unnecessary ? Without the Imposition of a Law could our Freedom have been exercised ? Without a Penalty annexed to the Transgression, and a Reward to the Observance of it, what Incitement or Motive would there have been to Obedience ? As Man was created free, as well

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as innocent, his falling into Folly could not have been prevented, unless his Freedom had been restrained, or the Condition of his Being reversed. An Expedient however might have been thought of, to rectify the Abuse of that Freedom, whenever it happened, which was foreknown, and to reconcile the Permission of such an Abuse with the Goodness and Wisdom of God. An Expedient, by which he might, notwithstanding his Follies, be entitled to the divine Favour, be a proper Object of Providence, and merit an everlasting Reward. This Expedient hath been offered thro' the Mediation of Christ; by him all Offences have been atoned for, and through him every Vice committed is upon Repentance forgiven. How gracious to Man is God! If the Permission of Sin in the World seems to be marvellous, not less so doth his Mercy appear in his Redemption from it *.

Thus,

* The Introduction of Evil was the Abuse of the Freedom God had given to Man; of which he can no more be said to have been the Author, because he might have withheld it from him, (which, if rightly used, makes him happy, if abused, miserable) than he can be said to be the Author of Drunkenness by making the Vine; the Fruits of which, temperately used, enliven the Spirits, and strengthen the Constitution of Man; when taken to Excess, deprels the one, and destroy the other.

To ask, why was Evil permitted, since in its Consequences it is so fatal, is a bold Question? It is not to be answered, nor solved by human Reason. If we allow the Being of a God, we must ascribe to him all Perfection: We must consider him as a

Being

This, our Redemption, is another Truth, which hath been objected to. Could not the Deity, it is said, have pardoned Sin without an Atonement; or, if he had required an Amendment of Life for past Guilt, would not that have been sufficient; or, if Man was to be received into Favour by a peculiar Revelation, should not its Truth and Authority, that all might be Partakers of the Blessings contained in it, be irresistibly convincing?

The Means and Conditions of Salvation are in God's Power: Our Salvation is his free Gift: No one therefore hath any Right to object to the Method used for effecting it. It is an idle and wicked Amusement, to consider what God could have done, and to be dissatisfied with, or disapprove of what he hath done. The Method of dispensing Pardon to us, and atoning for our Sins, must be allowed to be just, since, by God's ap-

Being of infinite Goodness and Mercy, and taking a Delight and Pleasure in the Happiness of all his Creatures: Therefore, though some Things, such as the Permission of Sin and Misery in the World, seem to be inconsistent with and contradictory to the Notions we have of the divine Attributes, who will charge the Almighty with Folly? Who will say, that he hath done wrong in creating Man? Had he not been created, he would not indeed have felt any Sorrow, or known any Misery; but neither is the Consequence of his Creation: They are the Effects of his own voluntary Sin and Wickedness. As every Man may be virtuous and good, and by that Means be happy, if he is not, and becomes miserable, he cannot reproach his Maker, for what was his own Fault, and for Sufferings which he might have prevented.

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pointing it, it is certainly agréable to him. That Sin can be pardoned without any Satisfaction, and Offences freely remitted without any expiatory Atonement offered, are Matters not to be known by us, and therefore to assert either is a bold Presumption *.

* Repentance is an Acknowledgment of Guilt, but not a Satisfaction for it. A Sorrow for Sin is no Remedy for the Evils occasioned by the Commission of it. Confession of Crimes shews a good Disposition, will not make us innocent. But is not God a gracious and merciful Being? Is he not Almighty? Could he not then have made Repentance the Condition of Acceptance with him? What he could have done, is not known to us; what he hath done, Revelation informs us. Such Condition doth not appear to be either equitable or reasonable: For if it is necessary, to keep Order and Decorum in the World, that Laws should be made, it is also necessary that they should be recommended and enforced by suitable Rewards and Punishments, as an Encouragement to the Good, and a Terror to the Wicked: It will be otherwise difficult to support their Authority, to procure them Reverence, and make Men honest and good. But how are the Good encouraged, or the Wicked terrified, if the one goes unrewarded, and the other unpunished? Without this Expectation and this Fear there would be Disorder and Confusion with every evil Work. Justice then must have its due Course, and Repentance is of itself ineffectual to divert it. If then it is not reasonable, that God should pardon the Sins of Mankind without an Atonement, and Revelation mentions the Atonement, it may be safely concluded, if God could have so done, that the Method he hath appointed for admitting Man to his Favour, seemed to him, by such Appointment, to have been the most equitable and just. If by Repentance the Wrath of the Deity could have been appeased, if Sorrow of Heart and Amendment of Life could have answered those Ends, for which Christ is said to have died, Christianity would never have appeared. If without the Sufferings of Christ Salvation could have been administered with Propriety and Equity, he would not have suffered. God condescended to this Method of expiating the Guilt of Man, and satisfying his own Justice, because Man of himself could not expiate it, and none other Satisfaction was so fit and proper.

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From the Method taken to pardon Sinners, it may be fairly and justly concluded, that neither of those Ways was consistent. Amendment of Life also seems not to be a proper nor sufficient Claim to Forgiveness: For the future Observance of Duty is doing nothing more, than what was at all Times strictly obligatory, and which should never have been violated.

Though the Evidence in Support of Christianity is not the least deficient, and the Necessity, with the Reasonableness, of such or a similar Revelation being made is apparent, some are found who doubt of, or suspect its Authority ; yet it is humbly presumed, that the Deity cannot interpose in determining Man to believe, no more than he could have prevented Man from falling into Sin. Faith is a voluntary Act of the Mind.

We may reasonably assent both to the Necessity and the Truth of Christ's Mediation. The many Sins and Iniquities we are guilty of evince its Necessity, and the Evidence of Miracles confirms its Truth. Though all Men are convinced of the Necessity of a Mediation, all Men are not satisfied of the Truth of Christianity. It is no Wonder that the Doctrines of the meek and humble, the afflicted and persecuted Jesus should meet with
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an unfavourable Reception amongst those, who lust after the Things of this World. This Lust it is, which raises and encourages Prejudices in the Minds of Men, against what makes for their Peace and eternal Salvation. Great indeed is the Mystery of Godliness. Mysterious as it is, there would be no Objection to it, if Men had no Vice to gratify, no Sin to indulge. It seems however strange, that any should refuse to accept the Means of Salvation; for if criminal Pleasures are agreeable, the most profligate and abandoned, when brought to think seriously, must detest them, and be desirous of having his Conscience disburdened of Guilt. The Manner how this grand Event was brought about, we are unacquainted with: But that our Sins are forgiven, and a full and sure Pardon is secured, if we repent and amend our Lives, we have the Word of God for it, confirmed by the Display of a supernatural Power.

Why, it may be said, was not this Revelation published sooner? Would it not have been equally useful and comfortable to the Ages before, as those after it? Why should Mankind at any Period of Time been left in Doubt, Uncertainty, and Ignorance of the saving Truths of the Gospel, if they were necessary to be known?

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Are not all People alike the Object of the divine Favour and Love?

These Reflections are natural, and the Reasons why these Things were not so, we know not. It becometh us, however, to think, that God's Time was the best; who is worthy of Praise and Thanksgiving, for the Blessings he hath graciously vouchsafed to make known to us, which were concealed from former Ages: Not that they were left to perish, and we only were Partakers of his Goodness. If so, the Complaint against the Gospel, on Account of its not being published before, would be just. The Persons who lived before Christ, will be justified or condemned, accordingly as they have observed or neglected those Laws, which they by the Light of Nature and Reason discovered, or had been enjoined them by civil Authority; notwithstanding those Laws might be found upon Examination not to have been strictly just and good: For no Man can be answerable for doing wrong, when he is of Opinion, that in so doing he doth right.

The Virtues and Vices, practised in a State of Nature, will meet with as exemplary a Reward and Punishment, as those practised in a State of Grace. He that observed the Laws of Reason, and he that observes the Precepts

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of Revelation, are equally entitled to a Participation of the divine Favour and Goodness. The Actions of the one are not indeed so pure as the others; because the Knowledge of moral Duties acquired by Study, cannot be so exact and perfect, as that which is communicated from Heaven. Notwithstanding this Deficiency and Imperfection, virtuous Actions, performed in an honest and upright Heart, antecedent to the Gospel Dispensation, are valuable and acceptable in the Sight of God. Errors and Mistakes, proceeding from Ignorance, not wilful, are pardonable. All Mankind will have a suitable Reward or Punishment hereafter, in Proportion to the Degree of Knowledge they have received or acquired.

Though we are not acquainted with the particular Reason, why Christ did not appear sooner in the World, we may observe the great Necessity there was for his appearing at the Time he did *. Though the Ages be-

* It was the Time of universal Peace, the *Roman* Empire was at its Meridian of Power and Grandeur, and the Age was both learned and inquisitive. The People had both Leisure and Abilities to enquire into the Authority of any System proposed to them. As the Gospel recommended itself to the Reason and Understanding of Mankind, what Time more proper, when there was a Taste for Learning? If it had been published in the Ages of Ignorance and Barbarism, those Persons, who now ask why it was not published sooner, would have then objected to it as a pious Fraud, because Men were incapable of judging of its Truth, or detecting its Falseness.

fore his Appearance were very corrupt and wicked, and Idolatry universally prevailed, the Jews believed in and acknowledged the true God; the *Medes* and *Persians* at one Period of Time, the *Grecians* and *Romans* at another, were eminently distinguished for their moral Honesty, Integrity, and Modesty.

At the Time of Christ the Morals of Mankind were greatly changed, and soon after his Death a Corruption of Manners became universal. The Jews by their Traditions had made the Law of little or none Effect. The Form of Government amongst the *Romans* was altered; and they who had conquered the World, were themselves enslaved by those Vices, which had made them the Masters of it. This Age then seems to have been the most seasonable and proper for publishing the gracious Scheme of the Gospel Salvation, and making known to the World the Laws of God, when those who professed a Belief in him, had lost not only the Spirit, but corrupted the Letter of their Religion, and the idolatrous Nations were debauched and vitiated in their Manners.

How, Reason may ask, came the Saviour of the World to appear in such a low and humble Condition, which rendered him rather an Object

of Contempt and Derision, than of Esteem and Choice? How was it that he did not assume the Air and Authority of Majesty, which would have commanded Respect, enforced Obedience, and procured a more easy and quick Reception of his Doctrines? Greatness and Goodness thus united, few could, with any Decency and Success, have resisted and opposed. If so important and interesting were the Truths, he was to deliver to Mankind, why did he not enter upon the grand Work sooner? Why did he not continue in it longer? Why did he make Judea the Place of his Residence, amongst an obstinate and refractory People? Why, as the Saviour of the whole World, did he not preach to the several Inhabitants of it, as well as to the Jews? Why did not he himself commit to writing those Things, which were necessary to be known, believed, and practised?

Wonderful art thou, O God, in thy Doings! Unsearchable are thy Dispensations: Yet it must be acknowledged, that the Judge of all the Earth, the Creator of all Things, cannot do wrong. Presume not, O Man, to say what ought to be done: Think not the Deity to be such a one as thyself; that whatever is right in thine own Eyes, must be so in his. If Christ had appeared with princely Pomp and Splendour, human Liberty would have greatly suffered by it; Men would have been
overawed

overawed with the Fear and Dread of Power to have received Doctrines, which they were to be wrought upon to accept and believe by Reason and Persuasion. Had he so appeared, it is not probable that he would have been better received by the Jews, who opposed the Evidence of Miracles. It was not necessary that he should personally publish the Gospel of Peace to all the World, inasmuch as he had chosen Instruments for that Purpose. His Residence in *Judea* was not improper, as its Inhabitants were the most violent Opposers of his Doctrines; were then, and are now, the most obstinate Unbelievers. Though he hath not given under his own Hand an Account of his Transactions, what we have received is highly deserving of Credit; because written by those who had been conversant with him, and had given sufficient Testimony to the World, that they could deliver nothing but the Truth, as they were inspired from above, and possessed of a divine Power.

The Time of his Appearance was shewn before to have been proper. Though short the Continuance of his Ministry, it could not have been lengthened, otherwise than by overruling the Inclination of the Jews, which was unnecessary, as he had given sufficient Proofs of his Ability to execute the Office of a Redeemer;

deemer ; that he was no Impostor ; and that he would be a Rock of Salvation to all, who should believe on him.

The Scriptures declare Christ to have been the Saviour of the World : To redeem Mankind from the Guilt of Sin and its Punishment, to instruct them in the Will of God, and to reward them with eternal Life, was the End of his coming. Do not the same Scriptures say, that not many will be found worthy of that glorious Reward, that only a few will be saved ? What then becomes of the gracious Intention of the Almighty ? Why was Man made, if he is not to be happy ? Would it not have been better for him, that he had never had Existence, or not to have been what he is ? Can the Creator delight in the Misery of his Creatures ?

Be thankful, O Man, for what thou art ; God was pleased that thou shouldst thus exist. I know not the Reason, why I was not otherwise made : A more exalted State, or a different Nature, might have been more pleasing : But I have no Reason to complain. I dare not ask, why was I thus formed ? For what Right had I even to exist ? It was the Will of God, that I should be what I am. If there are Beings above me more noble and excellent, there is a Multitude of others vastly inferior,

inferior, and at a much greater Distance from me, than I am from them. Should I not then be thankful for the Station in which I am placed, and praise my Maker for thus eminently distinguishing me above the brute Beast that perisheth? Is it nothing to be endued with Reason, to have Hope in our End, to be Heirs of Immortality, and to partake of everlasting Bliss and Glory? Hadst thou, O Man, any Claim to these Favours? What is thy Merit to entitle you to this peculiar Distinction? My Being was the free Gift of God: He had an undoubted Right to place me, in what Order of Beings it seemed good to him. This he thought best for me; it was his Pleasure, and I must submit; and should willingly submit, since I am assured, that I shall be equal hereafter to the Angels of Heaven, equal in Happiness, and the Duration of it. If I should not enjoy the promised Happiness in another Life, or am miserable in this, I cannot accuse my Maker: He made me not wicked, but good. Though my Virtue may be tempted, he hath not left me without a Power of resisting the Temptation. If I am more willing to indulge a vicious Inclination, the Consequence of which is well known to me, rather than act agreeable

to Duty, whom can I blame for the Folly but myself?

We are, by the coming of Christ, placed in a State of Salvation: If we accept the Means, and do what he hath prescribed us, we shall be certainly saved. Our Salvation is not absolute, but conditional: It could not have been otherwise without destroying human Liberty: If it could have so been, there would have been no Necessity for the Interposition of a Mediator. God might have prevented, as well as permitted Sin, if he could have saved as well without, as with the Performance of moral Obedience.

Christ died for all Men, and all Men may be saved: None are lost, but such who are Sinners against their own Souls: He cannot compel any one, contrary to his own Inclination, to be happy. He hath shewn us the Paths which lead to Happiness; but leaves it to ourselves, whether or no we will walk in them.

We are certainly in a more comfortable Situation, than the Ages before Christianity. The Nature, Properties, and Attributes of the Deity are revealed to us; our Worship is neither idolatrous, nor superstitious; our Duty, the Pardon of Sin, Acceptance with God, and a future State are made known to us: The Glory
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of which we shall partake of, if by a good Life we seek to obtain it ; even Sinners, when they repent, will be entitled to the same Reward : And is it reasonable that they should without Repentance ? What God may do, we know not : There is not any Authority from his Word to believe, that he will confer it ; and every thinking Person will allow, that he who hath not lived the Life of the Righteous, can have no Claim to, nor any Hope of receiving, the Reward of the Righteous.

Christianity was not intended to make any Man wretched and miserable. We find, however, many wretched in this Life, and a vast Multitude of others, according to the Scriptures, will be miserable hereafter. But Christianity is not the Cause of this Wretchedness or Misery ; that is the Effect of an evil Disposition in our own Minds, and a Desire for vicious Gratifications. Should not Christianity then direct this Disposition, and restrain this Desire, that Men might be kept from doing such Things, as will be their Ruin both here and hereafter ? It cannot, consistent with our Liberty ; it can only purify, not change our Nature ; it can cleanse us from all Sin, but not prevent us from falling into it ; it can assist us in the Performance of our Duty, but
not

not absolutely determine us to be, or to do good ; it considers and deals with us according to what we are, reasonable and accountable Creatures.

I know that I am free to do whatever pleaseth me ; I believe also God to be a Being of unlimited Goodness. But will not some Men be miserable ? The Scriptures affirm it. Is it consistent with the Goodness of God to permit it, or to give to Man a Freedom, which he knew would be abused ? How to reconcile these things with each other, God's Goodness and Man's Freedom, is beyond the Power of Reason to do ; notwithstanding, both must be allowed to be true. I find such a Freedom within myself, and must acknowledge, if I admit the Existence of a God, that he is good. The Operations of this Power, and this Attribute, are obvious ; yet how they operate, without interfering with one another, is a Secret that we are not acquainted with ; a Truth too deep and intricate for human Inquiry. Still there is Reason for celebrating the Goodness of God towards us, in that he hath offered Salvation to all ; and his Wisdom appears in this, that he hath left Man as he made him, and the Gospel found him free, either to accept, or refuse it.

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When we consider the Troubles and Sorrows in Life, the various Calamities and Distresses suffered in it, and the numberless Disorders and Diseases existing, which the Poor are afflicted with, the wicked more, and from which the Rich, the Powerful, and the Good, are not exempt, can we suppose any future Misery to remain? Are not the Sufferings of this World sufficient? Can any Sin, or any Number of Sins, be adequate to an eternal Punishment? Do a few Years bear the least, much more an equal Proportion to Millions and Millions of Ages? What Impiety, what Wickedness so great, as to doom the Aggressor to everlasting Misery? What Crimes can a finite Being commit, which may merit an infinite Punishment? The greatest Sinner cannot be without some good Qualities, which may entitle him to Favour. If he had none, do his Offences deserve such a severe Sentence? Wretched Man, if such is to be thy Portion! Happier by far than thou the Brute that perisheth. Annihilation, uncomfortable as the Doctrine is, would be preferable to that State. There must, therefore, be no future Existence, or every one will be happy in it.

An Eternity of Torment is undoubtedly a Truth very disagreeable to human Nature, and what human Reason is very unwilling to admit: It is a revealed Truth, and therefore

fore we should acquiesce in the Justness and Propriety of it. The Deity intends not that any Man should be miserable, either here or hereafter. We find, however, that many are so here, not through Necessity, but their own Folly and Imprudence: The Consequence of which is also Misery hereafter. Without such a Punishment, severe as it is, the Practice of moral Virtue and Goodness would not be very extensive, and Vice and Wickedness would much more abound in the World. The Heathen found it necessary to introduce and support the Belief of this Doctrine amongst them; and to it may be justly ascribed all the noble Exploits and virtuous Deeds recorded of their ancient Heroes and greatest Philosophers. If this Doctrine had been omitted in the Christian Religion, there would have been a much greater Depravity and Corruption of Manners, than in the Ages preceding its Publication.

Though many and severe are the Miseries of Life, the Promise of future Bliss is sufficient to silence every Murmure against the Goodness of God in permitting them. If we deprive ourselves of this Happiness, by neglecting the Means of securing it, which Means God hath put in our Power, what Right have
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we to complain of the Severity of the Punishment, or its Duration.

Is it any Injustice to condemn Actions, which are neither approved of, nor justified by Reason? Is that Punishment to be accounted severe, which, upon an impartial and serious Reflection, must be acknowledged to be the just Reward of Obstinacy and Impenitency? If Men live wickedly, can they either censure or impeach the Goodness and Justice of God for the unhappy Consequence, which foreknowing they might have avoided, and by dying wickedly, they bring upon themselves? Such Persons, if their Term of Life had been fixed at a Thousand Years, would not in all Probability, a few Exceptions admitted, alter, nor change their Manners. Of the Truth of this Observation, there is a melancholy Proof in the Conduct of the Inhabitants of the old World; whose Wickedness was as great, as the Age to which they lived. If Men then would, had they had the Power and Opportunity of so doing, have sinned to all Eternity, what Severity is it, if they shall be eternally punished? Whose Fault is it, if they should so be, when knowing the Danger they may, if they do not escape it? Let a Man resolve to be good, and the Difficulty of parting with Vice will immediately vanish. The Inclination

clination to Virtue and Vice is in the human Soul equal: No Man is under the Necessity of sinning: Most Men, unless in Cases of Surprise, have Time for Reflection and Recollection; so that the Temptation to sin is not more powerful, than the Ability to withstand it, provided Resolution be not wanting.

Hath not God a Right to propose what Laws he pleases, and to enforce the Practice of them, by whatever Sanctions he in his Wisdom shall deem most expedient to procure Obedience? If the Laws were unjust, or such as Man by Nature could not observe, to have required Obedience would have been unreasonable, and to have inflicted such or indeed any Punishment for Disobedience would have been cruel. Such are not the Laws of God: They insist upon nothing that we cannot do, or that we ought not to do, or that we allow not as fit to be done. Are we prohibited any Enjoyment that is not injurious? Do we not sensibly experience Sin, to be not only displeasing and offensive in the Sight of God, but hurtful and prejudicial to ourselves? Is it not acknowledged, that the Pleasure received from the Gratification of any vicious Passion, falls exceeding short of that Pain, both of Body and Mind, which is the certain Consequence of it? Is it not as certain, that no such Consequence

quence attends innocent Gratifications? Doth not a Complacency of Mind accompany a good Action? Is not Uneasiness the inseparable Companion of Guilt? The Laws of God, therefore, may with Pleasure be observed.

However severe the Penalty affixed to Crimes by the Civil Laws, the Subject cannot reasonably complain. Is he compelled to do wrong? The Punishment he suffers for so doing, is the Effect of voluntary Wickedness in himself: He may be forgiven, but it is not consistent with good Policy, neither with the Safety of the State, nor the Security of Individuals, so to do. Thus, though the Proceedings of God are not to be judged by the Ways of Men, most certainly what is deemed just for Man, cannot be accounted unjust in God to do: He hath an equal Right with Society to make Laws, and to punish the Transgressors: Without a Penalty annexed to the Transgression, Laws would be useless; a sufficient Authority would be wanting to deter Men from vicious Practices; the Pleasure and Reasonableness of doing good would have little Influence upon the Multitude, if there was no Dread of Evil for the doing wrong.

Robbery and Theft are by the Civil Laws deemed worthy of Death. Are the Crimes equal to the Severity of the Punishment?

Certainly

Certainly not. It is however inflicted, and not without Reason, for the better Security of private Property. There seems to be a Necessity for such a Punishment: For if some Men dare to violate the Laws, notwithstanding this Penalty, how much more than now, would the Persons and Property of Men be exposed to Rapine and Violence; how much more would Dishonesty and Injustice prevail, if the Penalty was to be laid aside? If the Punishment also of Disobedience to the divine Laws was temporary, Men would be more loose in their Obedience.

Though the Punishment appears terrible, the Greatness and Excellency of the Reward must fill us with unspeakable Joy and Gratitude. A weak and imperfect Obedience, through the Merits of Christ, will be entitled to everlasting Bliss and Glory. What Merit have we to deserve so much, and so well, at the Hands of God? If we should do all that is commanded us, shall we have done any Thing more than our Duty? Our Virtues may be great, but our Imperfections are so many, that we may rather dread a Punishment, than expect a Reward; much less Reason have we to expect a Reward so glorious, as the Gospel hath promised, which is the free and gracious Gift of Almighty God. In this his Goodness exceeds the Severity

verity of his Justice; for he bestows a Reward, which even the best of Men cannot deserve, and threatens to inflict a Punishment, which every Man may, if he pleases, avoid.

The Scriptures say, that God worketh in us both to will and to do of his good Pleasure. Is this consistent with my Freedom to be thus determined, or am I to ascribe my Salvation to God, and my Damnation to myself? If without divine Grace I can do nothing well pleasing and acceptable to the Deity, it is not I that do it, but the Grace that is within me, and I thereby cease to be any longer free: If I do it not, can I be justly accountable, because Grace is with-held from, or not given to me? For without Grace, it is said, I can do nothing.

Of the Nature of divine Grace we are ignorant; with the Manner of its Operations we are unacquainted; that God can work upon or dispose the human Mind, all Men, who admit his Existence, must allow: For what is there, which a Being of infinite Power cannot do? That he can do it without any Injury to human Liberty, is not so clear; and it is unreasonable to suppose an Exertion of this Power by the Deity, unless upon Occasions of the most extraordinary Importance.

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God, however, may assist by secret Impulses the virtuous and the good, though he cannot over-rule their Will, so as to make them to be absolutely governed by them; for then they could not be accounted free and reasonable Beings. It would appear an Act of Cruelty thus to assist the good, and to leave the wicked to themselves, who certainly stand in most Need of such Assistance, not only to lead them to Repentance, but to prevent their future Misery.

Divine Grace co-operates with our Endeavours after Virtue and Goodness, but doth not dispose us to be virtuous and good; it doth not precede, but accompanies us in the grand Work of Reformation; it doth not determine, but directs the Will; it may set before us the Folly and Danger of Sin, but cannot prevent, nor restrain us from falling into it; it may shew us the Paths of Righteousness and Peace, but cannot compel us to walk in them.

Such are the Operations of the Holy Spirit, which are consistent both with human Reason, and human Liberty. If no Man can be good without divine Grace being the efficient Cause, where is his Freedom of acting? If a Man cannot repent, unless he is moved by divine Grace, can his Will be said to be free? If no Man can be a Christian, unless he hath
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the Spirit within him, what becomes of the Reasonableness of Christianity? If we admit any Operations of the Holy Spirit, different from those mentioned, we shall find it impossible to prove Christianity to be a reasonable System, and to make Man accountable for his Actions. If he hath not Power of himself to do good, or to abstain from Evil, how can he be a proper Object of Reward or Punishment? If it is absolutely necessary for all Men to have Grace, because no Act of their own can be good, acceptable, or profitable without it, where is the Goodness of God, if they have it not? Where his Justice, if any one should die impenitent, and be exposed to eternal Misery?

Men of unsettled Principles in Religion, of strong Imagination but weak Understanding, fond of Novelty, and affecting Singularity, have so explained the Operations of the Holy Spirit, as to have destroyed both the Freedom and Reason of Man, in attributing his Piety, his Goodness, even his Salvation, solely to that Being. This Error arises from a wrong Interpretation of the Word *Grace*, which hath not always the same Sense and Meaning. In some Places it signifies the peculiar Powers given to the Apostles by the Holy Spirit: In others, it is to be understood of the Redemp-

tion wrought for us by Christ; as when it is said, *By Grace ye are saved*: that is to say, *Our Salvation is the Effect of the divine Favour, we ourselves being incapable of doing any Thing to merit it.* It is also to be understood of that Aid and Assistance, which the Holy Ghost affords good Men in the Discharge of their Duty, and offers to the wicked, when resolved to repent, towards recovering them from the Error of their Ways, and the better to enable them, for the future, to follow the Commandments of God. It is never to be understood of any extraordinary Inspirations, inward Feelings, sudden Impulses, or irresistible Workings, as promised to the Professors of Christianity. The Aid and Assistance offered are conditionally, if Men are disposed to repent, and to be good, not whether they have that Disposition or not. The extraordinary Operations mentioned are not necessary, either for the Furtherance of the Gospel, or the Comfort of Believers; not for the Furtherance of the Gospel, for Faith must be the free Act of the Mind, no Man is to be compelled to believe; not for the Comfort of Believers, because they are sufficiently assured by the Gospel, that their Sins will be pardoned, and they in due Time will receive the Completion of the Promise of eternal Life, if they

they are careful to perform the Conditions required of them, *To repent of their former Sins, and to lead a more holy and godly Life for the future.*

Reason is a most noble and excellent Faculty ; it is the peculiar Property of Man ; it is a Ray of Divinity, which distinguishes him from the animal World, gives to him the Pre-eminence above all Creatures, and manifests a Likeness to the great Author of his Being.

For these Purposes it was given, *To guide him into the Way of Truth, to discover Error, to caution and guard him against Sin and Folly, to contemplate the wonderful Works of God displayed in the Creation, by his Providence, and his own Preservation ; which will lead him to an Acknowledgment of his Existence, and lay the Foundation for a just and sensible Worship.*

How few do make this Use of Reason? How many do abuse or neglect it? And when abused or neglected, how hurtful and pernicious doth it prove? *Why then was Reason given to Man? Unless he had the Power of always using it properly and rightly, can it be accounted a Blessing? If the Deity had a Regard for my Happiness, should he not have deprived me of Reason, or have prevented such an Abuse of it, as he knew would make me miserable? Would it*

not have been better to have had my Nature changed, to have been degraded, and placed in a lower State, than to have been at all unhappy? Is not the Condition of Ideots and Naturals far preferable to a reasonable, and at the same Time a miserable Being? Is not the Condition of Infants, who are without Understanding, or Children in whom Reason hath scarce dawned, more desirable than that of a perfect Man, whose Knowledge may be his Ruin; who, had he died in the early Part of Life, could have felt no Sorrow here, nor have been exposed to any Misery hereafter?

Cease we from complaining, and rest we content as we are: God is just and good; Man is ungrateful and wicked; he gave him Reason; the Application of it he left in his own Power; he is not insensible of the Disadvantages resulting from a wrong Application. If, therefore, he suffers, whose Fault is it? His Knowledge doth not make him miserable; it is the Employment of it in the Service of his Lusts. If I am unhappy, it is owing to my listening more to my vicious Appetites, than the Voice of Reason: This always points out to me, what is fit and right to be done. If I neglect this Admonition,
why

why should I murmur, when Troubles and Misfortunes come upon me ?

If Temptations to Sin were stronger than Man's Power of resisting them, or Reason so weak as not to be a sufficient Check to his Appetites, then he might complain of the Disagreeableness of his Condition, and give the Preference to a State of Ignorance and Insensibility : But it is far different. If he attended to the Voice of Reason, before he yielded to the Solicitations of impure and vicious Desires ; if he reflected, before he committed Sin ; if he studied as much to subdue, as to humour his Appetites, he could not complain of the Weakness of human Reason, but would find it sufficiently strong and powerful to serve all the Purposes of Life, and to prevent that Wretchedness and Misery, which a Neglect, Disregard, or Disuse of it, brings upon foolish and wicked Men.

Reason is certainly a divine Blessing ; the Enjoyment of it is justly accounted the greatest Happiness, and the Deprivation or Loss of it the worst Calamity that can happen to Man. No Sight is more shocking to Human Nature, nor do any Objects so strongly excite Pity and Commiseration, as Persons of an insane Mind. If we turn this divine Blessing into a Curse, by an Abuse of it, do we not

deserve to suffer the Consequences of it? Ought we to blame the gracious Giver of it? If Men by Luxury and Intemperance render the Fruits of the Earth, intended for their Comfort and Support, hurtful and pernicious to them; if instead of pleasing, they indulge their Appetites; if instead of confining their Passions within the Bounds of Decency and Duty, they exceed those Bounds, ought they not to accuse and condemn themselves for their Folly and Wickedness, and not cry out against God for giving such good Things, with Appetites and Passions to enjoy them? As little Occasion is there for Men being displeased for that Reason, which God hath given them; which will prove, what it was designed to be, when used aright, the Instrument of Happiness both here and hereafter. If any one, by an improper Use of it, in making it subservient to his Lusts, diverts this Intention, as it is his own free and voluntary Act, he must charge his Misery to himself, by having frustrated the Goodness of God towards him; who is free from the Imputation of Cruelty and Injustice.

Can Man, it is said, be the Object of divine Wrath for the Gratification of the Appetites and Passions

Passions implanted in him? Why had he them, if they were not intended to be gratified? Of what Use to him, if they are not to be gratified in a Manner agreeable to him, if he is under any Restraint, and not permitted to live at large?

The Passions and Appetites were undoubtedly implanted in us for wise and good Ends, to make Life pleasant and comfortable, not unhappy and miserable. They may be gratified, not indulged. So long as they are kept within due Bounds, and under proper Restrictions, their Dictates and Influences may be innocently followed, and lawfully complied with.

How fatal and pernicious the Passions and Appetites are, when not thus restrained and regulated, daily Experience furnishes too many melancholy Proofs. To what are most of the Misfortunes, either in publick or private Life, to be attributed? To the Licentiousness and Ungovernableness of the Passions. The Consequence of this Indulgence hath been weakly and wickedly imputed to the Deity; because, by permitting the Action to be done, he must allow and approve of its being done, his Goodness else would move him to prevent the doing of it.

Man

Man is possessed of such Powers as are suitable to his State and Condition: He hath an Understanding to enable him to know his Duty, and sufficient Abilities, when known, to perform it: In the Possession of these Powers he is distinguished from the rest of the visible Creation. If his Actions were to be determined by a superior Agent, wherein would be the Difference between him and the Brute? What greater Claim to Immortality could the one have than the other? The Actions of both, if they proceeded from Necessity, would be equally meritorious.

The Christian Religion, though it strongly recommends the Practice of Sobriety and Temperance, and prohibits the Enjoyment of unlawful and criminal Pleasures, doth not condemn, nor disallow of the Use of any Thing, which may serve to refresh the Body, or exhilarate the Mind, nor deprives us of any Amusements, which are innocent, becoming, and reasonable. Is not this Prohibition just? Would a wise and prudent Man desire greater Liberty? Will not a good Man be content with the Permission and Allowance of such Things, which make his Life easy and happy? Can an excessive Enjoyment of Pleasures, or criminal Indulgence, which brings Misery upon the human Race, weakens the Faculties
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of the Soul, impairs, if not destroys, the Constitution, be worthy of Pursuit, or the Object of Desire? How unjust is it, therefore, to complain against Providence for condemning and prohibiting it.

There are Vices which seem to be constitutional, for which some Men have a strong Desire; whose Inclination towards them early discovers itself, before they have either the Power, Ability, or Opportunity of gratifying it: And notwithstanding the Advantage of a pious and religious Education to correct it, a just Sense of the pernicious Consequences attending the Gratification, the manifest Prejudice it is to their Health, their Interest, and their Reputation, and the Aversion and Detestation they have at particular Times for them, they will indulge themselves in them. What shall we say, when Men are, as it were, naturally inclined and excited to the Commission of Sin? If their Conduct is criminal by committing it, is it not also pardonable? Will God be extreme to mark what is done amiss by them? Will he not rather pardon, than condemn; pity, than punish them?

Some Men, indeed, have a stronger Propensity to Vice, than others. This doth not derive its Origin from Nature, but from Practice:

tice: If it was from Nature, then the Wickedness committed must be imputed to God, as the Author of it, and Man could not be justly punished for doing, what he had not the Power of avoiding. Far be it from any one to think thus impiously of so pure and holy a Being, out of whose Hands we come into the World without Spot or Blemish. All the Creatures he hath made are good, and such he pronounced them to be. He who was Almighty, neither could, nor would make any Thing imperfect: But would not Man have so been, nay more, miserable and wretched, if he had been born with vicious and irregular Desires? This is not his Condition; vicious and irregular Desires are not engendered with, but acquired by him: Evil Example first corrupts him, and by constant and frequent Gratifications, without Restraint, and without Remorse, the Vices he is addicted to, appear to him to be natural or constitutional. By this Means Vice being formed into an Habit, it becomes extremely difficult to conquer it, and Temptations to sin are not easily resisted, nor opposed.

It is well known, what Weight Pleasure hath over Mankind, and that notwithstanding the pernicious Effects it is productive of, which no one can be ignorant of, Men will
 seek

seek to enjoy it. No Distress whatever can affect, no Danger terrify, no Remonstrances move him, who is resolved upon the Gratification of a vicious Passion; Reason is unattended to, Conscience lulled asleep, and Religion without Power. If Men listen to their Passions, rather than to their Reason, it need not surprise that they should transgress their Duty, and be so easily prevailed upon, when solicited, to commit Sin; and when by repeated Offences they have lost all Sense of and Regard for Decency, practising Vice boldly, and without Fear, they begin to look upon that as the Effect of Nature, which they have made constitutional, and impiously impute that to God, which is produced by an Heart hardened through wicked Practices.

The Aversion and Detestation which Men are said to entertain for their Sins, at the very Time they commit them, must be very faint, weak, and insincere, and their Inclination to gratify much stronger: If they were real, why do they not avoid the Places, where they know that they shall be solicited to criminal Pleasures? Why do they not abstain from those Things, which will certainly excite Desire? Can he be said to have a sincere, if any Dislike for Sin, who seeks for Opportunities, and goes where he will be greatly importuned to commit

mit it? He that truly and sincerely hates and detests Sin, will not be guilty of it; and those who say that they hate and detest it, even in the very Act, so say, not from a Conviction of the Crime, but a Dread of the bad Consequences which may flow from it, prejudicial either to their Interest, Credit, Fortune, or Health.

Why should a Man be virtuous? Is he not often miserable on that Account? Doth not the persisting in his Integrity bring upon him many Misfortunes, which by swerving from it he might avoid? Are not the Wicked prosperous? Is not their Wickedness oftentimes the Instrument of their Happiness? Is this an Encouragement to be good, to see Men who sin, not to be the worse but the better, not to be more miserable but the happier for it? If there is a God, who presides over and governs the Affairs of this World, should he not reward the Good, and punish the Bad?

The unequal Distribution of Good and Evil in this Life is an Objection frequently urged against Providence, which, it must be allowed, is not visibly proportioned according to the Merit of human Actions: It would be difficult to reconcile this Proceeding with the Wisdom and Justice of the Almighty, if the Doctrine of a future State was excluded.

Reasons,

Reasons, however, may be assigned, why Providence doth not interpose in every Affliction and Calamity, which may befall the good Man: Though its Intention in permitting them cannot be fully known, it cannot be charged, either with Neglect, or Indifference. Man hath many Imperfections, and is frequently guilty of Folly; may they not, therefore, be sent for a Chastisement and Correction? Patience and Resignation are Christian Virtues; may not Disappointments and Troubles be permitted to display them? Beneficence and Charity are natural and social Virtues; without Objects indigent and necessitous could they be practised?

If Virtue is distressed, and Vice prosperous, that Peace of Mind, which the wrongly injured enjoys, arising from the Consciousness of having done nothing to merit it, is some Alleviation of the Affliction; and the inward Uneasiness, which the Guilty feels, greatly diminishes the Happiness received.

We may unjustly censure Providence in this Matter; for though a Man seems to be good and pious, and therefore accounted undeserving of the Calamities he may suffer, will any one presume absolutely to say, that he is so? May not his Goodness and Piety be counterfeited? We can only judge of Things by Appearances;

Appearances; are those Appearances always real and true? If not, may we not be deceived? Have we not found our Judgment frequently erroneous and mistaken? Charity, indeed, teaches us to entertain the most favourable Sentiment of Men's Actions, and to look upon them according to what they appear to be; but it is better to be somewhat deficient in Charity to Man, than to think injuriously of the Goodness of God. As we are entirely unacquainted with the Secrets of the human Heart, (he that made Man alone knowing what he truly is) and we are daily experiencing Blessings from Heaven, we shall certainly err less in saying, that Man suffers justly, than that God acts unjustly in permitting his Sufferings.

It is highly imprudent, as well as criminal, to blame Providence; for Misfortunes in Life are oftentimes the Effects of our own Weakness, Indolence, Inattention, or Inadvertency; are sometimes occasioned by the Malice and Frauds of others, or by unforeseen and unavoidable Accidents and Losses in Business and Trade. These Misfortunes may be remedied by future Industry and Application; if not, as they are such as will frequently occur in the present State of Things, Providence, without altering or reversing the established

blished Laws of Nature, cannot interpose at all Times to prevent them; nor is it necessary that it should, as there will be a future State: If there was not, Complaints against Providence would appear to be just. Hard Fate for the Virtuous and the Good, if they should in that Case be unhappy; they certainly ought not to suffer any Pain or Sorrow here, if they are not to enjoy Happiness hereafter.

Is it possible that I should be saved? Is not absolute Holiness required? Must I not be perfect, even as God himself is perfect? What perfectly holy? No impure Thoughts? No irregular Desires? No vicious Inclination? Must I be absolutely free from Sin? Must I become as God? The Creature as his Creator? Alas! who can so be? If such is the Condition of Salvation I am undone, I am lost for ever: Infinite Wisdom alone cannot err, infinite Goodness alone can do no Wrong. Can Man, a weak, frail, and finite Creature, be like or equal to such a Being? Who is he that is spotless and innocent? Let him appear. He is no where to be found. Who then will be saved? Wherein also is the Love and Tenderneſs of God to Man in Christ, to offer to him Salvation upon Conditions impossible to be performed?

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If such were the Conditions of Man's Salvation, Christianity would be a cruel and unreasonable System: Unreasonable, because perfect Holiness no Man can attain unto; cruel, to amuse Men with the Promise of eternal Salvation, which, from the Conditions of it, they can have no just Hopes of ever obtaining. Such is not Christianity; it considers us as Men, and expects no more Virtue and Goodness, than an imperfect Being can shew.

For whom did Christ die? For Sinners only? No. The Righteousness of the Righteous will be found defective, not without Blemishes: They cannot be justified in the Sight of God. All Men have sinned, and fallen short of that Obedience, which would entitle them to eternal Happiness; to obtain which, the Merits of Christ are absolutely necessary: They render the imperfect Services of the Good acceptable to the Almighty, and cancel the Guilt of the Wicked.

The Christian is expected to practice every Virtue, and abstain from every Vice; for without Holiness shall no Man see the Lord. This cannot be understood of absolute Holiness; for such Perfection is not known amongst Mankind. There never was the

the Man, who sinned not ; the most cautious, vigilant, and circumspect, have been overtaken in a Fault ; they have been surprised by Temptations, sudden and violent, their Resolution hath failed them, and their Virtue been overpowered. Unless a Man was to be separated from Society, he could not always have his Passions and Appetites under due Subordination ; nor if so separated, unless he had never conversed with Mankind : For though Solicitations might be wanting, because he would be removed out of the Way of Temptations, Thoughts would arise, and Desires be entertained. Whilst we are in the Body, it will be impossible to keep the Mind intent and fixed on spiritual and heavenly Subjects.

I have now finished what was proposed, *A Vindication of the Justice and Goodness of God from popular Prejudices*, and it is humbly hoped with some Satisfaction. If thus good, gracious, and just are the Dispensations of the Almighty, why do Men find Fault with, or are indisposed to receive them as such ? If the Christian System appears both useful and necessary, as conveying to us the Knowledge of God and our Duty, with the Remission of Sins, in the Ages before it much

wanted and desired ; and would have so been, even now, had it not been revealed ; why should Men be incredulous, or attempt to depreciate its Worth and Usefulness ? If the Evidence, offered in Support of its Authority, is proper and sufficient to determine our Faith, and procure a Reception, why do not all Men heartily believe in, and most thankfully receive it ? What is the Cause, why any one should oppose it, should refuse so great a Good to his own Soul, and be an Enemy to his own Happiness ? The Cause is not entirely unknown. Men who find Fault with Religion, are themselves faulty* ; those who ridicule it, are unwilling to observe its Laws ; they who dispute its Evidence, on Account of their Vices, dread its Sanctions ; they who cavil at the Justice and

* That Vice, not the Desire of coming at the Knowledge of Truth, and the Discovery of Error and Superstition, first raises Doubts and Scruples about Religion, and is a leading Cause of Infidelity, is apparent. For name the Man of real Probity and Virtue, who ever was, or ever will be an Infidel. He who is addicted to no Pleasures, but what are innocent, and in his Enjoyments is moderate ; who is devout without Affectation, pious without Hypocrisy, just, honest, and upright in his Dealings with Man, must receive the Gospel with Joyfulness and Thankfulness of Heart. The Man whose Pleasures are unlawful, and Gratifications immoderate, a mere Formalist in Religion, and honest and exact when Necessity obliges him so to be, must have a Dislike for the Christian Religion, cannot be the Friend of that, which requires him to be pure, holy, and uncorrupt.

Goodness

Goodness of God's Dealings with Man, have little to expect from the one, and much to fear from the other. Vice first spoiled Man of his Virtue, and deprived him of Happiness; and that it is which prevents him from seeing those Things, which make for his Peace, and raises in him Prejudices against the Truths of Religion.



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Goodness of God's Design with which
into to escape from the one, and made to
two from the other. We are left with a plan
of this Venerable and dearest kind of things
nothing, and that is the whole of the
from being in the things which make for
in peace and order in their relations against
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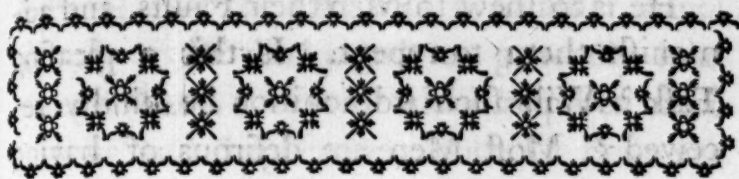
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P R E A C H I N G.

HE Office of a Minister is as difficult rightly to execute, as it is honourable to undertake ; honourable, as it is to set forth the Glory of God, and to promote the eternal Salvation of Man ; difficult, as it encounters with the Weaknesses, the Passions, the Prejudices, and the Vices of Mankind : It is without Fear, Guile, or Interest, with a becoming Boldness, Sincerity, and Zeal, to declare and make known, not to conceal nor disguise the Truth. The Word of God is not to be handled deceitfully, neither are Men to be led up with false Hopes, nor driven to despair of Salvation. A Minister is to be all Things to all Men, and, if possible, not to give the least Offence to any. A Work, great indeed to undertake, but much greater to execute.

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He is to shew to Men their Faults, and admonish them to repent. Is this a pleasing Task? Will such Admonition be kindly received? Most Men are desirous of having them concealed, and willing to be thought better than they really are. But to discharge his Duty faithfully, he must not neglect to do this: For this he took upon him the sacred Trust. Can he then answer it to his Conscience now, or to Heaven hereafter, if he doth not, to the utmost of his Power and Ability, endeavour to secure for them that Happiness, which Christ by his Merits hath purchased for them? For the Attainment of this great End he must employ every Talent, which Nature hath given him, and have recourse to every Method, which Art can furnish him with.

An Audience is a mixt Assembly of People, made up of the illiterate, who are to be instructed; of the sensible, who are to be convinced; of the conceited, who are to be pleased; of the pious, who are to be exhorted; of the sinful, who are to be admonished; of the penitent, who are to be comforted; of the formal, who are to be humoured; of the gay, who are to be attracted: All these are to be edified and improved, and none to be displeased, nor offended. An arduous Task!

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A Proof that the Office of a Minister is not so easy to be discharged, as generally imagined; but is a Work, which requires much Labour and Application, both of Body and Mind.

The Action proper for the Pulpit is to be determined by the Temper and Disposition of the Audience; the Manner most likely to affect and influence them should be consulted. It will be found, that a fine Voice, unless there is a Variation, accompanied with decent Gestures, as the Subject Matter may require, hath little, if any Effect upon the Passions and Understanding of the Hearer. It is surprising, that Men possessed of this Advantage, should not exert themselves; choosing rather to abuse this Gift of Nature, in an indolent and indifferent Way of Preaching; executing their Office, rather as a Kind of Business, Profession, or Living, not as a Duty and Work of the highest Importance and Concern, both to themselves and others; seemingly regarding more the Benefit, which they are to receive from it, than the Good which they shall do by it, *the promoting the Glory of God, and the eternal Salvation of Mankind.*

Previous to the Art of speaking well, must be that of living well. When Words and Actions do not agree, the Speaker will not be able

able to procure more than a transient Respect ; he may acquire a superficial Praise, but the one Thing needful for doing good, *the Affections of his Hearers*, he will never be Master of. The good Life of the Preacher is the most engaging Eloquence. He who acts consistent with his Character, and is himself, what he exhorts others to be, though he may not be remarkable for other Endowments, will never have any Reason to complain of Indifference, or Want of Respect in his Audience ; he will always be attended to with Pleasure, and his Reproofs will never fail of having a proper Weight ; he will be esteemed and valued, both for his Worth and his Work's Sake.

The principal Thing in speaking is *Feeling*, that is, the Speaker appearing interested in his own Expressions, as fully convinced in himself of their Truth. This is the Language of the Heart, and is a Kind of Intimation to the Audience, that what he recommends to them, he himself practices ; by it he bespeaks their Attention, gains their Favour, and disposes them to hear him with Pleasure and Improvement. This will be a sufficient Excuse for many other Defects, and will always make a sensible, deep, and lasting Impression upon Minds seriously and piously inclined ; being a
convincing

convincing Argument of the Preacher's Sincerity. Other Accomplishments and Abilities without this will be found defective, and to have only a temporary Usefulness; the Manner of the Preacher may be extolled, but his Advice will not be much regarded. The Design of such Preachers may be answered by acquiring Popularity, and a Name: The End of speaking, however, *the Edification of the Hearers*, is frustrated.

In Feeling the Preacher hath greatly the Advantage of the Player; the Sentiments are his own, not another's; he is the real, not the personated Character; here Nature speaks, there Art dictates. Notwithstanding, Art in this Instance is found to excel Nature. If we judge from the much frequented Theatres, and the Thinness of religious Assemblies, the Player seems to act his Part much better, than the Divine performs his. The Desertion of the Churches, and the crowded Playhouses, are general Complaints amongst the Clergy. If they do not properly exert themselves, they should not entirely ascribe it to the Gaiety and Levity of the Age. Devotion should be made a Pleasure, as well as a Duty: If the Preacher is indolent, or negligent, this Satisfaction is not to be had, and Indifference is unavoidable.

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The Statues, whose Discourses have as little of Spirit, as the Preachers, and whose Hearers, after the naming of the Text, frequently compose themselves for a more refreshing Nap, are of little Use or Service to Religion. It is scarcely credible, that Persons discoursing, either concerning the Attributes and Perfections of the Deity, or the gracious and marvellous Love of God to Man, exemplified in his Redemption, or the inestimable Benefits arising from it, *the Pardon of Sin, and the Hope of everlasting Life*, should appear not to be the least affected, nor warmed, but stand motionless; the People, as it were, hearing a Voice, and seeing no Man. If they themselves are not affected, how can they reasonably expect that others should, or with what Justice complain, that their Preaching is heard with Coolness? As it would be to little Purpose to recommend to the Practice of others, what our own Example condemns, so it is absurd and ridiculous to imagine, that others should be influenced, by what we ourselves do not feel. What but Contempt and Neglect must follow from a Countenance without any Meaning in it, from Expressions without any Feeling, and a Body without the least Action. If they have Eyes, and see not, the Audience, though they have Ears, will hear not.

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On the contrary, too much of Action is equally uninstruative, though not alike unentertaining, as a total Inaction; we forget the Speaker's Sentiments in the Manner of his Expressions; like the Pleasures of a Dream, when awake, they are soon out of Remembrance, or, like Lightning, they surprise, and leave no Traces behind them. An immoderate Elevation or Extension of the Hands (not always just on the Stage, but indecent in the Pulpit,) long and frequent Pauses (which no Subject will allow of,) the making a Multitude of Sentences of single Words (than which there can be no greater Impropriety in speaking,) and also the laying an Emphasis almost upon every Word (which it is impossible for every Word to admit, and by which the Force and Beauty of the principal Arguments are rendered obscure, if not destroyed,) are so many Pimples on the Tongue, so many Defects in Elocution, as have the strongest Appearance of Art (which should always be concealed) as well as Absurdity: By these Means a Discourse is unnecessarily lengthened, becomes tedious, and consequently disagreeable to the Audience.

Publick speaking, the nearer it approaches to private Conversation, makes the deeper Impression; it is void of Design, and hath not
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the least Appearance of Art. When the Preacher speaks with Ease and Freedom, it shews that he hath none other View or Interest, than the real Service and Benefit of the Hearer : Flourishes and pompous Expressions leave Suspicions of Deception, and seem as if intended to ensnare the Understanding, and pervert the Judgment.

If the Greatness of the Trust committed to the Ministers of God's Word is considered, namely, the eternal Salvation of the Souls of Men ; if it is also considered, that at the Day of Judgment they must give an Account of the Success of their Ministry ; as they should not neglect nor desert the Care of their Flocks, so should they make use of all Means, which may in the least be instrumental towards accomplishing that good Work.

Men are differently affected by what they hear ; the Matter hath great Weight with some, the Manner strikes others. It is the Business of the Preacher, both to convince the Understanding, and to influence the Passions. The Doctrines of Religion are to be treated in a rational and argumentative Way ; its Morality should be so recommended, as not only to touch, but to sink deep into the Hearts of the Hearers. Morality is of itself a dry Subject, though it entertains and improves the
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Mind : Unless its Precepts are delivered with Spirit and Warmth, they will leave only a faint, if any Impression. This appears in those Discourses, which are composed of tedious Periods, and as heavily delivered, without rousing the Passions by a different Change of Voice, and a particular Emphasis, or keeping Reason and Attention awake by frequent Interrogations and Pauses.

The Words in a Discourse should flow easy, and not appear to have been laboured ; the Expressions should be clear, that they may be readily understood ; the Reasoning close, not vague, that it may be better apprehended ; the Periods short, that the Subject Matter may be easier retained ; the Interrogations frequent, that the Attention of the Audience may be preserved ; the Pauses of such Length, that the Congregation may neither be disturbed, nor deceived ; the Digressions, if any, short, that the Connection may not be interrupted ; the Divisions few, that the Preacher may not be fatigued, nor the Memory of the Audience burdened ; and the Length of the Discourse such, that its Contents may be easier remembered, than forgot ; otherwise the Hearer, as it often happens, departs neither the wiser, nor the better. Not only the Style must be proper, but the Address and Delivery becoming

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and engaging. The Look and the Action must be according to the Nature of the Subject treated of. Vice should be spoken of with an Air of Contempt, to excite Aversion and Detestation ; Virtue with an Air of Complacency, to encourage the Practice of it; the Doctrines of Religion with Humility and Solemnity, yet with Dignity and Sublimity; Exhortations to the Practice of Virtue, and Dissuaves against Vice, in a friendly and familiar Manner. The smiling Countenance is artificial, not natural, rather bold, than decent; if becoming in a Player, in the Preacher absurd. To be vehement and loud, hath the Appearance of scolding, is neither graceful in the Speaker, nor pleasing to the Hearer. To keep the Eye fixed on the Book in the Pulpit, is reading, not delivering a Sermon; and in the Desk it is rehearsing, not offering up the Prayers. The Lord's Prayer, for Instance, should be delivered with a grave and pious Countenance, expressive of Humility and Dependence, and in the Character of a Suppliant, not with a Smile betokening a Familiarity, not allowable in a Subject, when addressing his Prince, much less from a Creature to his Creator.

What Manner in Preaching would be the most effectual for the Service of Religion, may
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be learnt from the Theatre : How agreeable and persuasive the Address there is, Persons, who have frequented the Stage, want not to be informed. It is the Gracefulness of the Actor's Delivery, which gives Weight to and displays the Beauty of the Poet's Sentiments ; without it the finest and most noble Expressions appear lifeless and insipid. We find that this theatrical Eloquence hath a good Effect upon the whole Audience, though the Majority is ignorant of the true Reasons, why they applaud and approve. As the Applauses come principally from those, who are incapable of judging of the Author's Sense and Meaning, they are certainly the Effect of the Impression made by the Action ; which commands the Attention of the Audience, and raises the Reputation of the Actor.

Why may not Action in the Pulpit be as agreeable and persuasive, as on the Stage ? Is it not found so to be, where it is used ? Is not the Audience pleased ? Are not the Preachers commended, esteemed, and attended, when they write and speak with Grace and Propriety ? Words without it are mere Sounds ; they only grate on the Ear, neither affecting the Passions, nor improving the Understanding. Are not the most indifferent Discourses, in Respect of Composition, heard with Pleasure,

sure, and spoken of with Praise, if the Delivery is engaging? Are the most elegant and learned Discourses heard and delivered with the same Advantages, if the Preacher's Delivery is disagreeable? The contrary is well known by the Dissatisfaction and Uneasiness visible in the Countenance of the Audience.

However commendable the Action of the Stage is, however deserving of Imitation, the Clergy should not be servile Copiers of it; in some Things there is a Necessity for a Variation, to avoid Impropriety. The Office of a Minister is to make Folly appear contemptible, the Business of the Player is to represent it as ridiculous, the Action therefore of both must be, as their Design, different; the Places also of Exhibition so requiring it.

What is it that procures Enthusiasts such a Multitude of Followers? By what Method do they, with Success almost incredible, propagate their Opinions? Is it not more owing to the Manner of delivering their Discourses, than the Matter contained in them? Their Delivery indeed is neither the most just, nor the most decent: It is however sufficient to keep Men awake, to excite an Attention, and to introduce a Belief of having a Regard for the Salvation of their Hearers.

If

If Eloquence is successfully employed in the Establishment and Propagation of Error, why may it not be as successfully employed in the Cause of Truth? Undoubtedly it would. When the Preacher appears sincere, and labours in his Profession, performing his Duty with Pleasure, he will acquire the Esteem of his Audience, and never have any Reason for complaining of Contempt, Indifference, or Desertion. He will find his Interest to be much better advanced by such a Regard and Zeal for his Function, than by neglecting it, and falling in with the Humours and Weaknesses of his Flock; who, though seemingly pleased with him, when present, will despise him, when absent.

Action may be accounted theatrical; it is however useful, becoming, and even necessary. If we visit many of the Churches within and without the City Walls, we shall find their Congregations to be generally thin and slender. The Cause is well known to lie with the Preachers, who seem not to be affected; and, if we may judge from the Delivery, do not intend to affect others.

Action seems at present to be confined to the Stage, it should also be a peculiar Excellency of the Bar, and the Pulpit; more particularly of the latter, as the Clergy are to re-

commend the Reception of Truths, of the Certainty of which their Hearers can have no Knowledge, nor any Intuition in this Life. It must be allowed, that the present Method of Preaching hath little Power and Efficacy, unless it is to drive away the Congregation from the Churches to worse Places, or to the Tabernacle. Let the other Method be tried, and the Effect of it will shew its Usefulness, and recommend its Practice.

The Schism which prevails in the Church by the new Sect of Methodists, which hath made, and still makes a very considerable Progress amongst us, requires an Exertion of all the Powers of Art and Reason to check and restrain: We have seen its Beginning, but what, or when, will be the End of it, we know not. Religious Innovations have been generally productive of pernicious and fatal Consequences. Mankind have been always fond of Novelty. Men, through Ignorance, Indolence, or Want of Leisure, are apt to receive Opinions, however strange and absurd, if new, with at best a partial, if any Inquiry. To persecute either the Founders or Followers of this Sect, would not lessen, but increase the Number; Opposition always rendering the Propagation of Error successful. It would not indeed be commendable so to do, because
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all Persecution is unjust, not only as it takes its Rise from Envy and Malice, but is also injurious to human Liberty; for it deprives Mankind, who are to be responsible for their Actions, of their Right of thinking and acting for themselves. As little Success may be expected from Argument; the Foolishness of Preaching may avail more, though Ridicule will succeed the best, in putting a Stop to it. Let the Clergy be regular and constant in the Discharge of their Office, appear earnest and zealous, spare no Pains nor Labour, and they will give less Occasion to their Adversaries for the severe (and we fear too pertinent and just) Complaints and Invectives they throw out against them; and the People would not be furnished with any plausible Excuse or Pretence for leaving their Pastors, and their Parish Churches, to go after Enthusiasts, who pervert the Faith of Christ, and make a Gain of Godliness.

The Power and Usefulness of Eloquence being so great, it must needs surprise, that the Study and Practice of it should be so much neglected, especially as Enthusiasm and Infidelity so much prevail. Can there be any greater Encouragement to the Practice of it, than the extensive Influence it hath upon the Minds of Men? Can any Thing be more useful,

ful, when it softens the most savage Disposition, and can convert Rage into Pity? Can any Thing be more powerful, when it will make a Multitude of Persons, of different Prejudices, Opinions, and Interests, to be of one and the same Mind? *Catiline* dreaded more the Eloquence of *Cicero*, than the Sword of *Anthony*. *Demosthenes* did more against *Philip* by his Tongue, than the *Athenian* State in Arms.

Why then is this Art neglected? Why not cultivated? If the Audience is to be persuaded or convinced of the Truth or Falsehood of any Matter, should not the Speaker embrace every Method, that serves to enforce, strengthen, and give Weight to his Arguments, or may dispose and incline it in his Favour? Action oftentimes doth more than Words: Yet how redundant are many of the Clergy in the latter, how deficient in the former; how elegant and pure the Stile, how awkward and clownish the Address.

If such is the Power of Eloquence, to compose and conciliate the most cruel, morose, and implacable Temper and Disposition, to inspire Men with noble and generous Sentiments, to beget in them a Love of every Thing truly great and good, can it be too much studied? Especially, since the artful and designing

signing Knave hath been able, by its Power alone, to seduce Subjects from their Allegiance, and engage Men in the most desperate and wicked Undertakings. Though a Discourse may be well wrote, unless it is accompanied with a graceful Delivery, its Influence, if any, will be weak, and its Duration short: Such a Discourse neither excites the Attention of the Hearer, nor adds any Reputation to the Speaker, who is on that Account either contemned or disregarded: Yet how incessantly do some Men labour to become learned; how desirous and solicitous are others of being so reputed, if they are not, and how few take any Pains to become eloquent. How greatly do Men affect to be well read, and much conversant in all Languages, but their own? How little of its true Pronunciation is, if known, attended to, or observed. The Bible and Common Prayer are delivered throughout in the same disagreeable Tone, with an improper Emphasis, no Difference nor Distinction made, either in the Sound or Meaning of Words, and all Expressions uttered alike, without Passion, Affection, or Feeling. The *Grecian* and *Roman* Orators are deservedly commended and praised, both for their Eloquence and Elocution: The Effects their Orations had upon their Auditors, one would
imagine,

imagine, should excite, in those who read them, a Desire at least of Imitation of their Manner.

It would be of Use to Society, it must be acknowledged to be necessary, and would be an Ornament to our Schools of Learning, wherein so many are training up constantly, either for the Bar, Pulpit, or Places of Profit and Trust in the Service of the Government, if the Youth was taught the Art of speaking, as well as thinking and reading; that they might be able to speak, as well as to write with Understanding. This seems to be the best Remedy for a Vice, which hath been long the Disgrace of Literature, and the Seats of Learning, hath made the Clergy ridiculous, and learned Men contemptible.

A School for instructing Youth (designed to appear in a publick Character in Church or State) in the Art of Eloquence should be established, who, at certain stated Times, should be called upon publickly to shew, what Progress they have made in it, both speculative and practical, and to give sufficient Proofs of their Ability and Qualification to appear in the different Stations intended for them. It must surprise, that though Learning is reviving, and the Age wants not for Persons eminent in the several Branches of it, we have but few Writers.

Writers. Men seem to be more fond of acquiring, than communicating Knowledge.

How often do we meet with learned Men, who have more Thoughts than Words? How often do we see them at a Loss to express their Sentiments in Matters of little Moment? How often surpassed by Men of little Judgment, and of less Erudition? If a Man is communicative, (and if he is not, of what Use or Service is his Learning, when the Publick receives no Benefit from it?) Should he not express himself in Words, which may render his Conceptions as clear and plain to the Reader or Hearer, as they are to himself? From this Defect we may observe, that Novels, Romances, &c. with the weekly and daily Productions of Wit and Humour, are frequently wrote better, than the Works of Authors of much superior Parts and Understanding. Hence it is, owing to the easy and familiar Stile, that the former are read with Pleasure, and the latter with Dislike, and appear tedious.

Several Tracts have been wrote against Revelation in a masterly Stile, and with great Shew of Reasoning. The Replies that have been made, though deservedly esteemed, have not been distinguished by the Names of the Great; who ought to have been employed
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and exercised in Works of this Sort, as they have more Leisure than others ; and, on Account of their Wealth, Fortune, or Preferment, they have the Advantage of extending and improving Knowledge, may be supposed to be better qualified in Respect of their Learning. If they do not preach, when attacked, they should defend and vindicate the Authority of Christianity ; especially as their Interest so greatly depends upon its Continuance and Support.

But of this, it may be imagined, there is no Danger, whilst the Civil sustains and upholds the Ecclesiastical Power. There hath been a Time, when the State thought it right and proper to chastise the Indolence of the Priest, and to appropriate his useless Wealth to reward those, who had much better deserved it by their publick Services. Another *Henry* may arise, and seize the larger Revenues of the Church into his Hands, and bestow them upon more worthy Laymen. There hath also been a Time, when Episcopacy was abolished, and wealthy Clergymen turned out of their Livings, to make Room for Sectarists and Enthusiasts ; who, though their Opinions were not the most pure and reasonable, were much more diligent and zealous in the Discharge and Execution of the Ministerial Office, than their

their Predecessors ; whose Indolence and Neglect afforded just Matter for Censure and Complaint. Such a Set of Men may again arise, and overturn the Hierarchy ; such a Set of Men, we fear, there now is, who have from the same Causes mightily prevailed ; we wish that the same Effect may not follow : It is no contemptible Sect. What they will be able to do, we know not, but what they may in Time do, there is Reason to be apprehensive of, when we consider what Men of much the same Principles have done in former Times.

Another Advantage arising from the Foundation of Schools of Eloquence in our Universities would be this, that our publick Speakers would be endued with a modest and decent Assurance, which many, for want of such, or a similar Foundation, acquire late in Life, and others never. Defects also in speaking would be corrected : Amongst which may be reckoned the disagreeable Tone, which they learnt at, or brought from School.

To what, it may be asked, is the Neglect of Eloquence owing, since the Advantages flowing from it are so many and so great ? To the Want of proper Encouragement, and to the frequent Distribution of Preferment both Civil and Ecclesiastical, not according to Merit, but Friendship, Connection, and Interest.

Will

Will any Man labour and toil to qualify himself for a Place of Profit or Trust, when it may be obtained at a much easier Expence, and with less Pains and Trouble? How can those Persons, who have the Power or Right, by Virtue of their Office, by paternal Inheritance, bequeathed or purchased Estates, to present to Livings, answer it to themselves, their Country, and God, by disposing of them, not according to the Merit of the Receiver, or as the Service requires, but sometimes from pecuniary Advantages, generally from a Motive of Interest, and frequently to those, who are either absolutely disqualified for any Employment, or have not any other Way of being provided for: Who are rather compelled from Necessity, than inclined by Choice, to undertake the ministerial Office. It is no Wonder, therefore, that such execute it with Coolness, Lukewarmness, and Indifference.

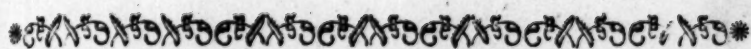
Hence it is, that so many of the superior Clergy are negligent of their Call, taking no Thought of, and seldom appearing amongst their Flock, leaving them wholly to the Care of their Substitutes, whom they procure at an easy Expence, not regarding by whom the Duty is done, or the Manner how it is done, so it is but done. What Advantage doth Society or Religion receive from such, who neither by their Writings, nor Example, nor Discourses,

nor

nor Manners, serve them? Who live by the Profits of other Mens Labours, and are supported in Ease and Indolence.

If many Livings in the Church are enjoyed by Persons of such Disposition, and such Qualifications, what Encouragement is given, or offered to Merit? What Encouragement is this to Learning? How hard the Fate of the inferior Clergy, who bear the Heat and Burden of the Day, to have no more than a bare Subsistence, to be frequently compelled to do Things inconsistent with their Profession, and unbecoming of the liberal Education received. How can they discharge their Duty properly and decently, who are oppressed with Poverty, and live, dreadful to think, in continual Apprehension of Want. Hence we discover the Cause of this Dearth of good and eloquent Preachers, namely, The superior Clergy are indolent on Account of their Wealth and their Livings, and the inferior are rendered incapable from their Necessities. This Dearth, in all Probability, will continue, 'till the superior shall be compelled to do a little more Duty, and the inferior are provided for in such a Manner, as to be above the Familiarity of the Vulgar, the Impertinence of the Wealthy, and the Contempt of the Great. A Provision much wanted, and, if we may judge from their Labour, by them deserved.

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THE
EVIDENCE
OF THE
CHRISTIAN RELIGION.



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CITY OF BOSTON
AS REVISED
IN THE YEAR
OF OUR LORD
ONE THOUSAND
SEVEN HUNDRED
AND FORTY
FOUR



THE
EVIDENCE
OF THE
CHRISTIAN RELIGION:

THE Evidence offered in Support
of the Christian Religion is two-
fold, *Prophecies*, and *Miracles*.
The Evidence of Prophecies was
particular, addressed to the Jews; of Mi-
racles general, addressed to all Mankind.
Agreeable to this Opinion is the different
Behaviour of the principal Adversaries of
Christianity: The Jews labour to destroy the
Pertinency and Propriety of Christ's personal
Application of the Prophecies to himself,
in order to set aside his Claim to the Mes-
siahship; Deists have made Miracles the
Subject of their Inquiry, and endeavoured to

disprove their Reality and Authenticity, in order to invalidate his Pretension of being the Saviour of the World *.

Prophecies were necessary to be given for the Conviction of the Jews; they, who had been frequently favoured with divine Revelations, might have reasonably expected some Intimation of an Event so important and interesting; their religious Prejudices and strong Attachment to the Law could not otherwise be removed, nor dissolved. The Heathen, who had no such Prejudices, were to be convinced by a different Kind of Evidence, Miracles: Without it a sufficient Testimony would have been wanted to the Truth of Christianity, its Doctrines would not have been so readily admitted, and the Assurance of Salvation upon the Merits of Christ weakly and precariously founded.

* Neither Christ, nor his Apostles could have had any temporal Advantages in View, from contriving and propagating a false System. Impostors always have a particular Regard to self Interest, and patiently submit to Hardships and Afflictions, because in the End they may turn out considerably to their Benefit and Profit. The Manner of Living of Christ and his Apostles shews, that they courted not Wealth, nor Greatness; the Pleasures of Life they relinquished, and looked not for present but future Happiness. It cannot be supposed, that they underwent such bitter and cruel Sufferings, as recorded, to enrich and aggrandize their Successors in the Ministry, some Centuries after their Decease: Their holy and pious Lives, with their extreme Poverty, displayed the Honesty and Integrity of their Intentions. The Opulence and Power acquired by Churchmen are no Reflection upon the Profession, if it affects the Belief of the Professors.

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As it is upon this Evidence the Authority of our Religion rests, and the Christian's Hopes depend, it is of Concern to him to make a strict and impartial Inquiry into it, that he may neither believe, nor hope in vain. Preparatory to which, it will be necessary for him to be satisfied both of the Necessity and Usefulness of the Revelation, which it was given to support, and to be convinced, that the Benefits Mankind receives from it, were worthy to be preceded and accompanied with such an extraordinary Display of Power.

The Christian or a similar Revelation was much wanted, earnestly desired, and generally expected: Expected not only by the Jews, but also by the Heathen, who from observing the many and great Defects in their religious System, looked for something divine to remove the gross Idolatry and Superstition, which had so long prevailed, to the Abuse of the Sense and Understanding of Mankind. They were not insensible of the Depravity and Corruption of human Nature, of the Ascendancy that Vice had over Virtue, of their Incapacity to find out a proper Atonement for Sin, of their Insufficiency to offer it personally, and the Want of a reasonable and true Mode of Worship. These Considerations might have occasioned the Saying

of a Philosopher, "*That it was impossible to rectify the Morals of Mankind, unless the Deity himself interposed.*" It was a Revelation much wanted by the Jews, to release them from the Observance of burdensome Rites and Ceremonies; and desired, to acquaint Mankind with a proper Expiation for Sin, and assure them of a future State.

If human Reason involved in Error was by its own Powers sufficient to answer all the Ends proposed by this Revelation, there would have been none Occasion for, and undoubtedly we should not have been favoured with it. Some Writers indeed have so thought, and laboured to prove its Sufficiency: It might indeed have so been, before Vice and Folly had produced an universal Depravity of Manners, and the Purity and Simplicity of religious Worship been corrupted by Idolatry and Superstition.

Reason, not to mention other Matters, can do much in discovering a perfect and complete Rule of Life; but Reason of itself, unimproved and uninstructed by Revelation, cannot accomplish it: It may by Labour and Application trace out some moral Duties, but cannot speak even of such, much more of the whole, with that Clearness and Precision, which is necessary, if intended to oblige, as
Revelation

Revelation doth. What were the Discoveries made by the Ancients? For by them we are to judge, what human Reason can do. There is indeed no Want of Thought nor Reasoning in their Writings, yet the Rule of Life contained in them is not so comprehensive, nor so exact, nor so just, as that laid down in the Gospel. What is the Power of human Reason in those Places, where the Light of the Gospel hath not shined? These indeed are Nations rude and uncivilized: But if not so gross and absurd, equally false and unjust, were the religious Principles of those polite and learned States, *Greece* and *Rome*.

Were not different and contradictory Maxims held and maintained in the different Schools of Philosophers? Did they all teach, believe, and practise the same Things? Was there not a perfect Contrast in their Sentiments concerning Virtue and Vice? If then a complete and satisfactory Knowledge of Duty was not attained by the Wise and Learned, they being, by their Writings transmitted to us, greatly divided in their Opinions concerning it, (whose refined Speculations and subtle Reasonings were superior to the Capacity of the Vulgar, to direct and regulate whose Conduct the pointing out mo-

ral Virtues, and recommending and enforcing the Obligation to practise them, were particularly useful, and also necessary, for preserving the Peace and good Order of Society,) what becomes of the Sufficiency of human Reason, so much boasted of, and so highly extolled? Christianity alone hath given us the whole Compass of Man's Duty. Whatever Beauty and Excellency appear in other Systems of Morality, to this they stand indebted; they have neither extended, nor improved the Plan; they have added no new Sentiment, though they may have enlarged upon the Subject Matter: Expression, not Invention, is their Praise. The useful and important Truths, of which the greatest Part of the Heathen World was ignorant, the wisest had not a perfect and clear but confused and uncertain Knowledge of, and we of these Times should have been Strangers to, are plainly communicated in the Gospel.

Christianity hath revealed to Mankind the Knowledge of the true God, hath declared that there is but one God, no inferior or subordinate Deities, that he alone made all Things visible and invisible, and he, and none other, is to be worshipped and adored. Were such the Sentiments of the Heathen? Was not the Number of their Deities infinite?

nite? Were they not guilty of the most gross and impure Idolatry, not only in worshipping of Men, like themselves, having the same Passions, Weaknesses, and Infirmities, but also the Beasts of the Field, and the Fishes of the Sea? In these Things, however, they merited not Resentment, but Pity; for Ignorance was the Cause of their Errors, and they had none to guide and conduct them into the Way of Truth. Those whose Learning might have contributed something towards correcting their Mistakes, publicly espoused and taught the same Things: Those who thought differently from the Multitude, nevertheless countenanced them in their Error, by religiously observing the sacred Rites and Ceremonies instituted in Honour of the national Deities. Equally impure and erroneous our Opinions would have been, if we had not been favoured with a Revelation: To this Blessing, and not to Reason and Philosophy, are we to ascribe the pure and simple Knowledge of the Deity. Christianity also hath been of Use, not only in extirpating Idolatry, and giving a just Description of the Nature of the Deity, but in establishing, beyond the Power of Scepticism, the Existence of a Deity.

The Gospel hath further made known to us the Properties and Attributes of the Deity.

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The most sensible and understanding amongst the Heathen ascribed, indeed, all possible Perfection to the Gods ; but in what that Perfection consisted they widely differed, and their Determinations concerning it were neither just, clear, nor satisfactory. The Omniscience, Omnipresence, and Omnipotence are important Truths, necessary to be known and acknowledged ; the Belief of them is of great Weight and Force in determining human Actions ; is a most powerful Incitement to the Practice of moral Virtues, and a considerable Check upon vicious and sinful Practices. Had the Heathen a Knowledge of these useful Truths ? So far from their Deities being reputed omniscient, omnipresent, and omnipotent, that their Presence and Power were principally local, could not extend beyond the Limits of the City, Kingdom, or Province, wherein they were worshipped, and their Omniscience was doubted of by some of the most Learned ; it being thought inconsistent with the Dignity of the Gods to know all Things.

It is not less useful to be fully instructed in the Nature of the divine Attributes, the Righteousness, the Justice, and the Goodness of God. The Sentiments of the Heathen concerning these Attributes vary greatly from the beautiful Description of them in the Gospel ;
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they could not reconcile them with the Conduct and Behaviour of Mankind. His Goodness they questioned, when they observed the Calamities, Troubles, and Distresses, in which good Men were involved, from a steady Adherence to that which rendered them worthy of a better Fate, and peculiarly entitled them to the divine Favour: His Justice they censured and exclaimed against, when they beheld the prosperous and flourishing State of the Wicked; Persons of the most infamous Characters, and corrupt Morals, attaining to the highest Honours, possessing the greatest Wealth, and enjoying the Pleasures and Comforts of this Life, unmolested and undisturbed: Of his Righteousness the Heathen must have entertained an indifferent Opinion, when Acts of Beastiality were sometimes done in Honour of their Deities, and a Sin contrary to Nature was approved of and practised, not by the Rabble, whose Ignorance would have been some Plea to have extenuated the Guilt, not the Foulness of the Act, but by Men eminently distinguished for their Power, Piety, and Learning.

Reflections upon these Observations must have naturally produced amongst the wise and discerning Heathen a Distrust, or Denial, of a supreme Cause. It is very probable, that they

they were the Foundation of these false and absurd Opinions, *That there was no visible Order, Regularity, Design, or Government in the World: That Things came into Being by mere Necessity, and, whilst their Being continued, were subject to the same Fatality, not under the Direction, Management, and Superintendency of a wise and gracious Being.* These Sentiments, however, must be allowed to have been natural. Reason could not account for the Equity of such Proceedings, that a Character reputed amiable amongst Men should not Merit the Notice, and when distressed, the Interposition of the Deity, and that the Wicked should be permitted to triumph in the Spoils of Virtue, and their Wickedness be the principal Cause of their Prosperity. Hath not Christianity then been of singular Benefit in communicating to us right Notions of the Perfections and Attributes of God, and not leaving Mankind to the Rovings of a loose Imagination to form Conceptions and a Judgment concerning them? How grand, just, and sublime is the Description given of the Almighty in the Jewish and Christian Writings; how superior to any of the most learned Heathen. The Superiority is easily accounted for: A divine Spirit guided the Pens of the one, human Reason,

Reason, unassisted and unenlightened, the other.

The Doctrine of a Providence is another Advantage received from the Gospel. This Doctrine was so far from being general amongst the Heathen, that few admitted it. The Existence of the Gods was believed, and the Necessity of Religious Worship allowed, but their having any Concern in the Administration of human Affairs was doubted, ridiculed, or denied. Such Affairs were deemed unworthy of their Notice, because the Observance of the Misfortunes, Distresses, and Miseries of Mankind would in some Degree, it was thought, have lessened their Happiness: Events, therefore, were attributed to Fate, Chance, or Necessity, that is, Things were governed by certain Laws invariable and unalterable*.

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* It is allowed, that in the Administration of the Affairs of this World, the Justice, Goodness, and Wisdom of the Almighty are not always striking and apparent: But is it not more modest and becoming in a Creature of a finite and imperfect Capacity, as Man is allowed to be, who is frequently mistaken in Matters plain and obvious, to attribute it to his Weakness and Ignorance, that he cannot apprehend the Manner of the Operations of a perfect and infinite Being, nor can always assign Reasons for his Proceedings, than boldly and confidently assert, that there is neither Order, Oeconomy, nor Government visible in the World? What Absurdity is it to believe, that he who made the World, and the various Beings in it, wherein every Thing is placed in such Order, Subordination, and mutual Dependence upon each other, as to have the strongest Appearance of Wisdom and Goodness, should
continue

It doth not indeed follow, because there is a God, that he must interpose in the Direction and Management of the Affairs of this World: Yet if he made the World, is it beneath his Dignity to concern himself with it? Must he not have prescribed certain Laws for the Government of the several Creatures and Beings in it? When those Laws are so broken, as to threaten a general Disorder and Confusion, may he not interpose to prevent the Ruin that would follow? If Men are remarkably wicked, yet through their Wealth and Power are rendered, as it were, superior to the Accidents of Life, and out of the Reach of Civil Punishments, doth not an Interposition seem absolutely necessary, not only for the Good of Society, but also to vindicate even the Being of a God?

How noble and beautiful, as well as just and sensible, is the Representation, which the Scriptures give of the Deity: *Like as a Father pitieth his own Children, even so is the Lord merciful to them who love him.—We are to cast all our Care upon him, for he careth for us.—If we keep his Commandments, he will take up*

continue his Wisdom in the Government, and his Goodness in the Preservation of them? Hath he not Power sufficient for this? Who, when he beholds the Universe, can doubt of it? Wherever he turns his Eye, he will see Instances enough to convince him of the Omnipotency of his Creator.

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his abode, and dwell with us.—His Ears are always open to our Prayers.—There is not any Thing that we can ask of him, unless we ask amiss, but we shall receive. When in Want, he will supply us; in Distress, relieve us; in Sorrow, comfort us; in Sicknefs, visit us. Is such Consolation afforded in that Opinion, which excludes God's moral Government of the World, and attributes every Thing to Fate? What Hope of Relief, when in Affliction? To Heaven Men might pour out their Complaints, but alas! would pour them out in vain, for there would be none to hear, regard, nor remove them.

Another Benefit received from the Publication of Christianity, is the fixing the Worship of God: For this a Revelation was much wanted, not only to clear it of idolatrous and superstitious Ceremonies, but also to acquaint Mankind with what would be fit and right to be offered to him. The Necessity and Propriety of divine Worship may be discovered by Reason; how it should be performed, what Time allotted for it, how often repeated, and what Rites and Ceremonies it should be accompanied with, are Matters not to be determined by it; the supreme Being alone knoweth, what is most agreeable to him. It is not possible for Man, from an Ignorance of
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the divine Nature, to frame and devise any Mode of Worship, without containing a Meanness and Unworthiness in it, unsuitable to the Majesty of Heaven. Proofs of this Observation are numerous. Let us read the sacred Rites and religious Practices of the Heathen: How absurd some, indecent others, and superstitious most. The Worship of the Jews, though of divine Appointment, was burdensome, made up of a vast Variety of Ceremonies. How different from Heathen or Jewish Worship is that required of us in the Gospel; in Opposition to the Heathen, how pure and simple is it; in Opposition to the Jewish, how few are its Rites and Ceremonies, and how easy the Performance.

Another Advantage received from the Gospel is the Knowledge of our Duty; with this Man before its Publication was unacquainted. A complete System of Morality was not to be collected from the Writings of the Ancients, such as would have met with a general Agreement and Approbation, and been upon a Level with the Understanding of the common People. Notwithstanding the Faculties of Men and their Engagements in Life are different, every one, from the highest to the lowest, the most illiterate as well as the learned, may

may have a clear and perfect Knowledge of Duty, it is so fully and clearly communicated.

Another Advantage is the making known to us the Means of Reconciliation and Acceptance with God. Here the Heathen were utterly at a Loss: How to obviate the Guilt they had contracted, they knew not. Repentance is an Acknowledgement of Guilt, not an Atonement for Sin; Amendment of Life shews the Sincerity of Repentance, but is doing nothing more than what ought to be done. This was all the Reconciliation they had to offer; of its Sufficiency and Acceptance they were ignorant, and of the Pardon of their Sins they had none Assurance. What comfortable Truths then hath the Gospel unfolded? Through the Merits of Christ we are reconciled to God: A sincere Repentance through them will find Acceptance. The greatest Offender need not despair of obtaining the divine Mercy; he may be confident of receiving Forgiveness: The Justice of Heaven is fully satisfied, its Wrath appeased, and Man's Offences atoned for: Christ hath made him free, delivered him from the Bondage of Sin, and remitted its Punishment. He is truly, what he saith, *the Way*, in having communicated the Will of God; *the Truth*, in having established the Unity of the divine Nature and a

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pure Worship, and *the Life*, by having expiated our Guilt, and brought Life and Immortality to Light. If human Reason had been capable of discovering a perfect Rule of Duty, of what Use this to Man, if it could not have discovered a proper Satisfaction for the Neglect or Transgression of it? The Founder of Christianity hath supplied us with both.

Another Benefit is the Revelation of a future State; the Nature and Extent of which it only hath set forth. It was indeed believed to be possible and probable, but certainly was not to be had; there was none Assurance, that we were not to be annihilated, and to perish for ever. The Jews and Heathen might have admitted the Reasonableness of such a State, from the unequal Distribution of good and evil in this Life, but neither could positively assert the Truth of it: A full, clear, and positive Revelation of this Matter was reserved for the Time of Christianity. What the Jew expected, the Heathen hoped for, the Christian is assured of: It is no longer a Question or Doubt with him, whether he shall exist hereafter or not, for God hath plainly revealed it unto him.

Such being the Benefits of the Gospel Revelation, it was worthy of having its Authority confirmed by an extraordinary Evidence:

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An Evidence rendered necessary, to assure Mankind that their Faith was just and reasonable, that they did not believe Christianity to be true, because the Things revealed in it were what they wished for and wanted, but as they came recommended and supported by a divine Attestation. That such a Revelation would be made, is very probable, as it doth not derogate from the Majesty of the supreme Being. If it pleased him to make Man, it could not be accounted inglorious, nor a Meanness in him, afterwards to do such Things, as would conduce most and best to his Preservation and his Happiness. When through Vice and Folly he had lost his primitive Simplicity and Innocence, when through Ignorance, a Degeneracy of Manners, State Policy, and priestly Artifice, the pure Modes of Worship were adulterated and corrupted, must not the Deity have pitied and compassionated such Distress? Might it not have been reasonably expected, that consistent with his Justice he would apply a proper Remedy for these Evils? As the removing the gross Errors of the Heathen was a Work vastly superior to the Capacity of the human Understanding, it was a Work worthy of its divine Author; he could not behold his favourite Creature, thus miserably fallen from

what he was originally, when created, without intending his Restoration; he could not have permitted a Being endued with Reason, and capable of the most excellent and exalted Attainments, made in his own Image, and participating, though in a remote Degree, of his divine Nature, to have been immersed in Barbarism, and to have continued totally ignorant of him, who made him: He could not see with Indifference and Unconcern the Honour and Adoration due to him alone, given to them who were no Gods, the Creatures of Imagination and Fiction, or to Men for singular Services done to their respective Countries, whom he himself had formed and fashioned. Would it not have considerably lessened the Glory of God, if, as he could, he had not directed Men in the right Way? Was it not more for his Honour, that Men should entertain true rather than false Notions of his Nature, his Attributes, and their Duty towards him? Though the Deity was not under a Necessity to reveal himself to Mankind, without a Revelation he could not, as now, have been honoured and adored, as God.

Though a Revelation is both possible and probable, and the Blessings derived from it much wanted, it should not as such be received,

ceived, unless supported by proper Evidence. As its Precepts and Doctrines are just and good, so should its divine Testimony be satisfactory, and clear from the Imputation of Fraud : Otherwise there can be none Assurance of Pardon, and no certain Expectation of future Happiness. To begin with the Evidence of Miracles, which determined the Gentile Converts to embrace Christianity, and is the principal Reason for our receiving it : An Evidence, which, in the Opinion of some, is much to be suspected, and even doubted of, whether any such Things ever were, have been, or could be done.

If the Miracles wrought had been to give Testimony to any Impiety or Immorality, to recommend any Precepts, which were unreasonable, or to establish any Doctrines, which were contrary to those Ideas we have of the divine Nature, they could not have been the Work of God, and such a Revelation would have been an Imposture : But such were not the Doctrines, nor the Precepts, either of Christ or his Apostles ; they were holy, just, and good ; and consequently the Miracles, performed to give Weight and Authority to their Sayings, may be fairly concluded to have been real, not pretended.

Previous to this Inquiry, it may not be improper to consider the Necessity of Christ's being endued with a Power of working Miracles. He asserted himself to be the Jewish *Messiah*; to this illustrious Character there had been several Pretenders, who, from the Misrepresentation of the Prophecies, acquired no little Credit amongst the Jews, and gained a Multitude of Followers. Had not the Testimony of Miracles accompanied the Application of Prophecies to himself, he might not have been accounted greater than one of the Prophets. As the Jews were required by their Legislator to hearken to and obey the Words of the Prophet, who should appear like to him, and as the Law was to be abrogated by him, an equal (if not a superior) Display of a divine Power was requisite to establish the System of the one, as was exhibited at the Promulgation of the other.

Had the Miracles of Christ been inferior to those of *Moses*, his Religion would have been deemed of less Obligation, and consequently would not have been so well received amongst the Jews: Had he wrought none, it would have been impossible to have persuaded a Jew to have renounced Obedience to the Law, which had the Seal of divine Authority affixed to it; his Prejudices against Christianity might

might then have been deemed reasonable and just. The Jews expected this Evidence of his Mission; the Want of which must have terminated in Unbelief.

The Heathen also, without this Credential of a divine Commission, would not have embraced the Christian Faith. Miracles, though false, were pretended, and by them believed, to have been done for the Establishment and Confirmation of their religious Opinions; without them they could not have been prevailed upon to have believed Christ a divine Person, nor would his Doctrines have been looked upon of greater Weight, than those of the ancient Sages. Could they have supposed, or been convinced, that Christ could have atoned for their Sins, and procured for them an eternal Reward, unless he had afforded some extraordinary Proof of his possessing that Power, and of his Qualifications to become a Mediator between God and Man? This effectually removed every Doubt and Distrust concerning the Truth of his Assertions, and his Ability of making them good.

The Design of Christianity was the Salvation of Mankind. But what Hope of its Accomplishment could have been cherished, unless its Author had given unexceptionable Proofs, that he could accomplish it? Man-

kind was not to be amused, nor flattered, but to be positively assured, that their Belief was firm and sure, and Christ was able to do, what he is said to have done, and promised to do hereafter : Miracles afford this Assurance, and therefore were necessary to be done.

A Miracle is a Fact contrary to the known and established Laws of Nature, which nothing short of a divine Power can reverse ; of this Sort was the raising *Lazarus* from the Dead, and the giving Life to the Widow's Son : These were Acts of Omnipotency. A Miracle also is a Fact, which, by the Circumstances attending the Performance of it, displays a divine Power : The curing of the impotent Man, the healing a Leper, and removing Deafness immediately by a Word or Touch, are Circumstances that proved the Works to have been wrought through God. The Miracles recorded in the Gospel were of both Kinds. The Cure of many of the Disorders and Diseases mentioned might have been effected by the Assistance of Art, and a proper Application of Medicine : But for this a considerable Length of Time was necessary. The instantaneous Manner, therefore, in which the Cures were performed, shews them to have been really divine.

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If the Miracles had been done wantonly, when there was no Necessity for such an extraordinary Interposition, or when they were of no Use, either to illustrate and confirm the Truth of Christ's Pretensions to his being the *Messiah*, or to promote and advance the Cause of his coming into the World, *the Salvation of Mankind*, Suspicions of their Authority might have been justly and reasonably entertained: But he always took the Opportunity of exerting his divine Power, either in the Synagogues of the Jews, or in Places where a large and mixt Multitude of the People was assembled, to prove his Mission, and to procure Credit to the Doctrines he delivered. None of his Miracles appear to have been exhibited in vain; they had their intended Effects, in relieving the Persons afflicted, in procuring a favourable Reception of his Doctrines with the Eye Witnesses of the Facts, and always increasing the Number of his Followers.

The Jews, sensible of these Consequences, and knowing the Impression Miracles would make upon the Minds of the Beholders, endeavoured to destroy the one, and divert the other, by blasphemously attributing them to an infernal Communication. His holy and pious Life was a sufficient Confutation of the base and infamous Charge. For the same Reason
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they contrived his Death, *lest all Men, on Account of the Miracles he did, should believe on him.* These, they were convinced, were of such Force, as could not fail of gaining him Reputation amongst the People, and determining those in Favour of the Christian Dispensation, whose Zeal for the Law was according to Knowledge. We find, therefore, that the publick Discourses of our Saviour were generally preceded by, or accompanied with some Miracle.

If the Miracles had been done privately, in Places of Secresy, Solitude, or Retirement, into which none but Intimates could have had Admission or Access, all others being excluded, their Genuineness might have been disputed: But they were done in the most publick Manner, and in Places of great Resort; not when surrounded by Followers and Friends, but Enemies of a violent, persecuting, and implacable Spirit; not in the Presence of those, who would have concealed and assisted in, but have discovered and exposed the Cheat. They, who had laboured with so much Art and Subtlety to entangle him in his Talk by ensnaring Questions, that they might have an Opportunity from the Answers, either of punishing him as a Blasphemer of the Law, or exposing him to the Resentment of the
Roman

Roman Governor; they, who suborned false Witnesses to accuse him of doing Things worthy of Death, would not have been backward in undeceiving the People, if there had been the least Ground for supposing him to have been an Impostor. They who pronounced him to be a Deceiver and Blasphemer, and put him to open Shame, would never have permitted Facts to have passed as miraculous, unless they had believed them to have been such. It might not have been difficult to have imposed upon a weak and credulous Disciple, but the partial and inquisitive Jew could not have been easily deceived. If the Miracles had not been real, the Jews would have mentioned it in their Charge against him to *Pilate*; which would have been a principal Article, and admitted as a just and sufficient Reason for cutting him off.

The Cures wrought could not have been the Effects of any previous Concert and Agreement between Christ and the Persons cured. A great Multitude flocked to him from all Parts round about *Jerusalem*, out of *Judea*, and from the Coasts of *Tyre* and *Sidon*, and brought along with them their sick and diseased: These were immediately healed, every one; not one, whatever his Complaint or Disorder was, returned unrelieved. Here was

a Number of Persons of different Tempers and Prejudices ; several of whom, it may be supposed, had only heard of his Fame, knew nothing of his Doctrines, and were excited out of Curiosity to attend upon him ; and others might go, not with a Design of hearing the Word, but of being healed of their Distempers. If possible, it is altogether improbable, that the Persons disordered and diseased, living in different Towns and Villages, unknown to each other, and some Miles distant from the Place where Christ was, should have only pretended Sickness, and the Fraud executed without Detection. It is not easy to conceive, how such a Fraud could have been attempted with any Hopes of Success ; the Persons concerned in it could receive no pecuniary Benefit from it, for there was no one to bribe them ; and without a Bribe it is not likely, that they would have been prevailed upon to have engaged in it : More especially, as by such Engagement they should be exposed to the furious persecuting Spirit of the Jew.

The Persons healed were of the common People, who, though they may be easily deluded and deceived, are not, from their Ignorance and Impatience, the most fit and proper Persons to be trusted with Secrets. Can it be supposed,

supposed, that the Man born blind (a Fact well known to the Jews) should have voluntarily lived in total Darkneſs for twenty one Years, and his Parents have permitted it; or the Woman, who had an Iſſue of Blood, ſhould have exhausted all her Subſtance upon Phyſicians, and freely expoſed herſelf to all the Miſeries of Want and Poverty; or *Lazarus* have ſuffered himſelf to have been entombed three whole days; or a fond and affectionate Mother, who was a Widow, ſhould have riſked the Life of her only Son, by permitting him to be carried out as dead, for Chriſt to have had the Credit of giving Sight to a Man born blind, of ſtaunching an Iſſue of Blood, of communicating Life to a dead Man, and raiſing another from the Grave? How theſe ſeveral Impoſtures could have been conducted without Diſcovery, is beyond Imagination to conceive, and the greateſt Abſurdity to ſuppoſe: He that believes they could, muſt at leaſt allow Miracles to be poſſible, and thoſe recorded in the Goſpel not to be incredible.

The Cures performed have been attributed to the Strength of Imagination in the diſeaſed Perſons. Imagination is well known to have been the Occaſion of many Diſorders. When was it ever heard to have cured any? The
Blind

Blind would have continued without Sight, the Leapers without cleansing, the Lame been incapable of walking, and the Deaf of hearing, had not some other Power been exerted. Allowing Imagination to be capable of effecting a Cure of these Disorders, could it have raised the Dead to Life? These Persons, who admit this Power of Imagination, with the View of discrediting the Gospel Facts, would not, if visited with Sickness, put the least Confidence in it, but rather make Use of the proper Means for obtaining a Recovery, by having Recourse to Art and Medicine. Is it not weak and ridiculous to say, that the Persons only imagined themselves to be cured, and were not? They, who received the Cure, and the various Diseases with which they were afflicted, were personally known to many of the Jews: Their Diseases were of such a Nature, as the Leprosy, withered Hand, and Blindness, that upon an Examination of the Reality of the Cure, the Jews could not have been imposed upon, nor could the cured have been insensible of the Relief administered to them.

If a Publication of these Facts had been deferred to a Time, when the Persons who might have detected, or been instrumental in the Detection of the Falsehood, were dead; or in Places too remote from the Spot of Exhibition

hibition to gain any certain Intelligence of their Genuineness ; or not till after the Jewish Government was dissolved, it would have looked like an Intention to deceive : But the Gospels were written, particularly St. *Mathew's*, when a Multitude of Persons were living, who by having been Eye-Witnesses, or by living in or near to the Places, where they were said to be done, might have informed themselves, or been informed by others, of the Truth of the Evangelists Reports. If the Facts were acknowledged in the Age when exhibited, and those immediately following, they cannot be justly objected to at this Time, if upon Inquiry they appear to be miraculous, and the Accounts transmitted to us are uncorrupt.

If the Cures had been performed upon Objects unworthy of the divine Favour, their Reality might have been suspected : But the afflicted Persons were such, whose Morals were not dissolute, or whose sincere Repentance recommended them as proper Objects. Had Christ exercised this divine Power upon Men of infamous Characters, it would not have appeared an unreasonable Supposition, that for the Sake of some latent Advantage, which in Time it might be made capable of producing, they would have concurred to have carried on the Imposture : But
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the relieved were virtuous, though poor, and consequently merited the Favour shewn them. Granting that some did not, it is probable that our Saviour knew, that the Cures wrought would be productive of a Reformation of Manners; this was a natural Effect, and they must have been extremely hardened in Sin, who did not reform. It was the principal Part of his Office to converse with Sinners, to convert them from the Errour of their Ways, and to save them from eternal Destruction: To guard against the Reproaches of his Enemies, who readily embraced every Opportunity of depreciating or reflecting an Odium upon his Character, and to avoid giving Offence to good Men, who might have suspected his Probity and Virtue, he always conversed with them in a publick Manner. Upon all Men, whether good Men or Sinners, in whom he found an honest Disposition to receive the Gospel Truths, and a sincere Intention to turn from the Evil of their Doings, he displayed his divine Power, by healing whatever Infirmities they laboured under.

That the Miracles wrought were genuine, may be collected from the Manner of their Publication: Not only the Cures are mentioned, and the Persons cured, but also the Places where. If they had not been real, or
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any Fraud been practised, the Names of the Places would have been carefully suppressed; for by this Means Men disposed to make an Inquiry, and not to take Things upon Trust, might acquire an absolute Certainty of the Truth of the Facts. If the Places where, and the Time when they happened, had not been recorded, such Accounts would have been unsatisfactory, and their Authenticity justly disputed: If they had been false, the Evangelists took an improper Method of concealing the Falsehood, by directing Men how, and where, they might easily detect it.

Have not many false Miracles appeared in the several Ages of the World, which have been reputed real? How are Christ's to be distinguished from them? By the Doctrines which they were intended to support and confirm; these were worthy of the divine Interposition: But not so the Errours of the Heathen, which the Gospel was intended to remove, and the gross Absurdities of the Papists, which it clearly condemns; these are a Disgrace to human Reason to admit and believe, and consequently their Pretensions must have been weak and impious.

Christianity receives this Advantage from pretended Miracles, they prove the Possibility of Miracles being done, the Probability that

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they

they have been done, and that it is no Weakness to believe them, if well attested, when done. The End, for which they are said to be done, will always shew, whether the Miracles are genuine, or not ; whether they are to be attributed to a divine Power, or human Artifice and Cunning. It would be equally difficult to prove the Miracles of the Heathen and Papists to have been true, when their Systems of Religion is considered, as to prove those of Christ and his Apostles to have been false, whose System was holy, just, and good. It is an unfair Conclusion, because there have been many false Miracles, all Miracles must be so. It might with the same Propriety and Reasonableness be said, that there is no such a Thing as Truth, because Falsehood so much abounds ; that there can be no sincere Friendship, because Selfishness is so predominant, nor any real Goodness, because Hypocrisy so much prevails. A Person who should argue thus, must be judged to be either weak or mad. The same Signs of Weakness or Madness doth he shew, who objects to the Miracles of Christ, because Miracles said to be done by Cheats and Impostors were Frauds and Forgeries, and an ignorant and credulous Multitude were imposed upon and deceived.

Miracles

Miracles then are a sensible and undeniable Demonstration of the divine Authority of the Person, who wrought them. The Declarations of one, who could thus alter or reverse the established Laws of Nature, must be allowed to be true, and all Mankind are under an Obligation to receive them. No one less in Dignity than God, or one empowered by him, could have performed the Miracles which Christ did. The Works of human Art and Device may surprize us, but we can trace out the Manner how they were wrought. There are Appearances in Nature striking and prodigious, but we can discover some of the Causes that produced them. Of Miracles no Solution can be given. What Relation or Connection is there between the Cause and the Effect? What Virtue is there in a Word or a Touch, without any external Application, to heal and cure Disorders and Diseases? To whom, but God, can such Operations be ascribed; for nothing short of infinite Power could have thus acted. We may with Safety and Certainty, upon this divine Testimony, acknowledge Christ to have been commissioned for the Purpose he himself said, *to save the World*, and, without the least Doubt or Distrust, receive what he hath

made known, as the pure and perfect Will of God.

If the Miracles of Christ were undeniably true, why, it may be said, did not the Jews, who beheld them, believe on him? How could they have resisted Evidence so striking and convincing? Must they not therefore have entertained strong Suspicions of their Falseness? Can their Behaviour be otherwise accounted for? Suspicions they entertained none: On the contrary the Jews, the Rulers, the Elders, even the high Priest acknowledged, that many Miracles were done by him. This might have been the leading Cause of their Resolution to destroy him, knowing that such a divine Power would naturally withdraw the People from their Observance of the Law of *Moses*. Their Dislike to and Rejection of Christianity, notwithstanding such powerful Evidence given of its Authority, were owing to another Cause. Lifted up beyond Measure with the grand Expectation of a temporal *Messiah*, who should deliver their Nation from the *Roman* Yoke, and raise it to its ancient Splendor and Grandeur, they could not reflect upon the Meanness of Christ's Birth, his Parentage, his Appearance, his Occupation, his Disciples, and Followers, with any Pleasure and Satisfaction, but with the utmost

most Disgust and Aversion. The avoiding Popularity, declining publick Honour and Applause, desiring his Actions to be concealed, not noised Abroad, shewed him to be void of Ambition, and rendered him odious to them, as he did not appear like to that glorious Prince and mighty Deliverer, which they had expected. This was not a private Opinion of the Jews; certain Prophecies, relating to the glorified State of Christ, by them misinterpreted and misapplied, gave Rise to it: It was therefore somewhat natural to them to be incredulous, when Expectations so agreeable to their Wishes and Desires were baffled and disappointed. There is nothing extraordinary in this Conduct. Great is the Power of Prejudice, owned and felt by all, but the Extent of it is unknown, and cannot be ascertained. Can there be any Absurdity equal to that of believing a Wafer, as the Papists do, to be the real Body of Christ? Wrong Notions, when heartily imbibed, are not easily eradicated; especially, if pleasing. Such is the Pride and Vanity of Man, that rather than be accounted weak, or confess his Ignorance, he will persist in a Mistake, and obstinately maintain it, notwithstanding the Ridicule it may expose him to, or the Inconveniences he may suffer from it.

The other Evidence, for the Authority of Christianity, is the Completion of certain Prophecies contained in the Jewish Scriptures*. This Evidence is personal, being addressed to the Jews to convince them of the Justness of Christ's Pretensions to the Title of the *Messiah*. Of what Force it was for that End, appears from their Endeavours, both at that Time and since, to invalidate the Predictions and Application, by misinterpreting and misrepresenting them, by altering and corrupting the Text. He did not, in his Discourses and Controversies with the Jews, appeal to Prophecies to prove his Mission, but to assure them of his being the *Messiah* foretold in their sacred Writings. An Attempt to convert them to the Christian Faith would have been unsuccessfully made, unless he had perfectly answered the Character and Description given of him by the Prophets. His Miracles shewed him to be a Person invested with a divine Commission, and would have enrolled him amongst the Number of the Prophets, but the Jews would not have considered him as that extraordinary Prophet, who was at the appointed Time to come into the World, un-

* The Reader will find this Subject fully and comprehensively treated by Dr. Newton, now Lord Bishop of Bristol. His Lordship hath not omitted any thing that may serve to convince the Jew, confute the Deist, and satisfy the Christian.

less he had verified the Predictions concerning him.

Divine Providence having particularly interested itself in Favour of this People, by selecting them from all the Nations of the Earth, by giving them a Law, by settling them in the Possession of a fruitful Land, and declaring to them future Events, it is reasonable to expect, that a Matter of the highest Concern and Importance to them would have been communicated to them; their strong and natural Prejudices to the Law could not otherwise have been removed. Their Unbelief seems to be without Excuse, who, with the Testimony of Miracles, have the Evidence of Prophecies.

From an Obstinacy and Refractoriness peculiar to this People, there are few Converts to Christianity amongst them; they resist the Goodness of God towards them, in endeavouring to raise a vast Variety of Cavils and Objections against the Propriety and Certainty of this Evidence: In this they have met with no little Assistance from the Advocates for Deism, whom they have foolishly encouraged, because their Intention is to subvert the Authority both of Judaism and Christianity by it, and to set aside all revealed Religion. It is therefore proper to shew, for

the Conviction of the Deist, and the Satisfaction of the Jew, that the Prophecies were of divine Inspiration, not of human Invention, and had an exact Completion in the Person of Christ.

A Prophecy is the foretelling an Event, that would happen at some Distance of Time from its Delivery ; whose Completion in the Nature of Things seemed to be impossible, or from present Circumstances altogether improbable : Such Predictions must have been from divine Inspiration, and the Events agreeing therewith been brought about by a divine Power. From known Circumstances and accurate Observations of Things, a Chain of probable Events may be formed : But when there is no Foundation from Occurrences to reason concerning Events, no Chain can be made, because no Conclusions can be drawn. If the Prophecies relating to Christ could have been discovered by Reflection and Observation, the Pretensions of the Prophets to a divine Character would have been justly questioned. Such a considerable Length of Time intervened between the Prediction and Completion of several Events, foretold many hundred Years before they happened, and depended upon mere Contingencies and the most uncommon and secret Incidents for their Accomplishment,

complishment, that no human Wisdom could have devised, nor any human Power have effected their Completion. Of this Sort was the Prophecy against the Altar at Bethel, whose Destruction happened about three hundred and fifty Years after, and those Prophecies of *Isaiab* respecting the Nature, Office, and Sufferings of Christ, which were delivered six hundred Years before their Accomplishment. Could the most lively Imagination have invented these Things? If they had been invented, they would have appeared, and in the End proved to have been idle Tales, the Dreams of Fancy.

If the Prophets had a private End to serve, or any secret Advantage in View, by pretending to a divine Commission, could there have been a greater Absurdity than to have delivered, what was incredible, and its Completion in the Nature of Things impossible? Of this Kind was that Prophecy of *Isaiab*, *A Virgin shall conceive, and bear a Son*. Could such a Prophecy have added any Weight to their Authority? Must it not have rendered their Sayings contemptible, and their Characters ridiculous? They were so far from having a Design to procure any temporal Advantage, that they were frequently exposed to, and oftentimes felt the Resentment of their
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great Men and Princes, from the unwelcome yet honest Freedom taken in admonishing and reproving them for their Vices and Impieties.

Their Pretences to Inspiration, if false, would have been easily detected. The Mean-ness of their Occupations and Circumstances in Life shewed them to be incapable of deceiving, or influencing any to credit their Predictions, if they had not been of undoubted Authority. Had they not been inspired, they could not have conceived such things, or if it had been possible to have conceived them, they would have had more Modesty, unless we suppose them to have been destitute of common Sense, than to have published them.

The Prophets were plain simple Men, not distinguished for their Wealth, Power, or Influence, but their Virtues, their Integrity, and Uprightness of Heart: They taught, that a pure Heart was the most acceptable offering to the Creator, superior to, and of more real Worth than Oblations and Sacrifices, or the most exact and scrupulous Observance of Rites and Ceremonies. Their Language is easy, familiar, and nervous. The Writings of *Isaiab* are grand and sublime; of *Jeremiah*, solemn and pathetic. Every thing is delivered in a Style suitable to its subject, and becoming the Dignity and Majesty of its divine Author.

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There is not the least Appearance of Weakness or Enthusiasm in their Character, nor are their Sayings the Sallies of a loose or warm Imagination, but the Words of Soberness and Truth. Can there then be any Doubt, or the least Suspicion entertained, of their Veracity, their Piety, and the divine Authority of what they delivered to the People? Such Persons could not have been guilty of Deception, nor have dared to publish the private Suggestions of their own Minds for revealed Truths.

This Condescension of the Deity, in making Use of some Men as Instruments to convey the Knowledge of his Laws, or to communicate any intended Act of Goodness to Mankind, doth not derogate from his Majesty. What Meanness to instruct and inform those, whom he was graciously pleased to have created? That Inspiration is an uncertain and precarious Method of conveying divine Truths, is a bold Assertion. Though there hath been a Multitude of Pretenders to it, and they have practised with surprising Success upon the weak and the credulous, their Falsehood hath been manifest, either by the Events contradicting the Predictions, or the Revelations being repugnant to those Sentiments of the divine Attributes, which the Light of Nature and Reason furnish us with, or by their im-

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moral Way of Living, or by their accumulating of Wealth, or by espousing and propagating certain strange and uncommon Tenets. All Pretenders to Inspiration have discovered themselves by being guilty of one, or more of these Articles. The truly inspired Prophets cannot be thus charged: Whatever they predicted was fulfilled, what they delivered was consistent with the divine Attributes, they were eminent for a pious and sober Behaviour, acquired no Riches, (living in a State of Indigence rather than Affluence) and their Doctrines were sensible and good. Besides these Proofs of a divine Commission, they gave others, which could not fail of affording full Conviction; which were these, the performing some Miracle, or predicting some Event, which was shortly to come to pass. Pretences to Inspiration shew, that a divine Communication is not a Thing impossible, and the Reception they have met with, suppose it not to be incredible.

Prophecies, it is said, are not a clear and satisfactory Testimony of the Pretensions of Christ, because they are capable of different Applications, and many of them are found to relate to other Things and Persons, and upon Examination to have had their Completion long before his Appearance. There are indeed

deed certain Prophecies, which have a double Meaning, and are applied to Christ in a secondary Sense: Though the primary Sense may easily be proved not to contain the whole intended, and that in him alone they were literally verified. The Matter however need not be contested, as there is a Variety of other Prophecies, which never had any other Accomplishment, than in him.

The Predictions concerning the Nature, Birth, and Power of the Messiah, with the Manner, Cause, and blessed Effects of his Sufferings; those which take Notice of the Time of his Death; of the Prophet, who was to come like unto *Moses*; of a Virgin, who should conceive, and bear a Son, were never fulfilled in any other Person. He really was, did, and suffered, what had been foretold several Ages before his Appearance. That he should die for the Sins of the People, and also the Manner of his Death, seemed to be altogether improbable: The Integrity of his Life, and the Goodness of his Heart, in relieving the Afflictions and Distresses, and removing the Disorders and Diseases of Mankind, it might have been imagined, would have entitled him to some publick Honour, rather than have doomed him to an ignominious Fate.

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If the Prophecies were necessary and useful, why, it may be said, were they so obscure, and so liable to Misapplication? They may have been obscure to the Ages, wherein they were delivered, but not to the Ages, since their Completion. The Terms, in which they are expressed, are not ambiguous, and were never so thought, 'till the Jew found an Advantage to his Prejudices against Christianity by representing them so to be. There doth not seem to be any apparent Necessity for their being clear to the Persons, who lived antecedent to their Completion. It would have been a just and reasonable Exception against their Utility and Authority, had they continued obscure at and after the Time of their Completion; but the Harmony between the Predictions and the Events is obvious: If there is a Disagreement between any, Ignorance may be the Cause, or some latent Errour, not any Falsehood.

That the Adversaries of Christianity should not be too free in their Censures, lest they should censure unjustly, and expose both their Ignorance and Malice, will fully appear from the following Instance. In the Book of *Micah* is a Prophecy relating to the Birth Place of Jesus. The Prophet speaks of it, as a *little Place*; St. *Mathew*, who notes its Completion

pletion, says of it, *not the least*. Here is certainly a Contradiction: However, it is easily reconciled; for by consulting the Sense of the original Word, it will be found to signify, both *little* and *great*. The sacred Penmen ought not to be charged with the Mistakes of their Translators. Incorrect, injudicious, and erroneous Translations of an Author are never looked upon as injurious to his Credit: This is Treatment, which some Persons would not presume to shew to any other, but the sacred Writers.

The Application of the Prophecies, made by Christ, must be allowed, upon the nicest Scrutiny, to have been plausible, pertinent, and just. As the Time fixed for their Completion is long since elapsed, unless they have already been, they never will be fulfilled. Impostors, it is true, there were many; but in Jesus alone were the Predictions accomplished. To prove his Pretensions real, and the Accomplishment certain, he wrought a Variety of Miracles: This Testimony with the honest and unprejudiced was convincing, and drew from them this ingenuous Confession, *Of a Truth this is that Prophet, who was to come into the World.*

Allowing the Difficulty in accounting for the Propriety of some Applications, they
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may, without any Imputation of Weakness or Credulity, after such Evidence of a divine Power, be acknowledged to have been just. If implicit Faith had been required, could it have been thought unreasonable to have confided in one, who never committed any Sin, whose whole Life was employed in Acts of Love, Goodness, and Mercy to Man, who voluntarily and patiently submitted to the greatest Indignities, and underwent a painful and shameful Death, to procure for him eternal Glory? It is not credible, that he, who thus lived, and acted, and died, would have deceived Mankind by false Pretensions to Prophecies.

If the Prophecies have not been completed in Jesus, in whom shall we look for the Completion? The Person foretold was to make his Appearance before the Destruction of the Temple and City of *Jerusalem*, and that Destruction was to be the Consequence of his Appearance. Did it not so happen? Were not the Temple and City soon after his Death destroyed? Are not the Jews dispersed? Is not their Form of Government abolished? If these Things are not so, let Facts prove the Reverse. These are Truths not to be gainsayed, nor resisted. All Pretences therefore to the Character of the Messiah from
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that Time must be false, and the Expectation of his coming vain. As these Events happened soon after the Death of our Saviour, and none other did give the same or equal Proofs of his being the Person prefigured; and if the Proofs recorded were really given, (of which there is a moral Certainty) the Application, made by him and his Apostles, must be allowed to have been pertinent and just, notwithstanding any seeming Difficulties which may arise in understanding it. If it was reasonable to deny the Truth of every Thing, unless a clear and distinct Knowledge of it can be obtained, not only the Completion of Prophecies in Jesus, but whether such a Person ever was, might be questioned. Few historical Facts could be admitted as true, if every Circumstance accompanying, preceding, or consequent upon the Transaction, was to be made as clear as the Transaction itself, before it should be admitted.

The Prophecies were delivered several hundred years before their Completion; they could not therefore, as pretended, from the Events so exactly and minutely corresponding to them, have been contrived and forged after the Events had happened. This Fallacy, if attempted, could not have succeeded. The principal Jews were against Christ, who

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would never have permitted such base Forgeries to have been inserted amongst the Oracles of God. Had they even espoused his Cause, so great was the Veneration for their sacred Books, they would not have consented to so foul a Deed. Had this Claim to Prophecies been proved after his Decease, in Places distant from the Scene of Action, and before Persons incapable of knowing the Truth, it might have encouraged a Suspicion of a fraudulent Contrivance to raise the Reputation of Jesus.

That the Prophecies might belong to Christ, the Expectation of the Jews at the Time of his Appearance, which was founded on the Prophecies concerning the Messiah, is a corroborative Proof. This Expectation was not particular, but general, and publicly talked of amongst them: They made no Secret of the grand Hopes they had entertained upon his coming, and behaved in so riotous and tumultuous a Manner, that the Roman Governor was apprehensive of an Insurrection: His Fear was not chimerical. Certain artful Men, taking an Advantage of this Rumour, and humouring their Passion for a temporal Prince, set themselves up for the Messiah, and by fair Speeches and delusive Promises drew a great Multitude after them, who

who with themselves perished in the Folly. The Prophecies therefore concerning Christ, which the modern Jews have endeavoured to overthrow, by finding out other Completions, may be allowed to be true from the Acknowledgment of the Jews, and the Sense entertained of them immediately before his Appearance: They had then no Prejudices against them, nor him. The Reason why they did not afterwards receive him as the Messiah, was the same that occasioned the Rulers and Elders to conspire against him, and made their Brethren in future Times attempt to destroy the Evidence of Prophecies, namely, *That he did not appear in the Character of a temporal Prince, delivering them from the Roman Yoke, and raising their Nation to its ancient Splendor and Grandeur.* It is not probable, that Christ, in whom the Hatred and Malice of the most malevolent Enemies could not find any Thing to blame or censure, would have made a solemn Appeal to Prophecies, if he had not known himself to have been the Person foretold: Such an Appeal, if it had been false, could not have escaped Detection: The Weak and the Ignorant indeed might have been imposed upon, but the whole World could not have been deceived. Could the Jewish Chiefs have proved the Falshood

of his Pretensions, they need not have laboured to convict him by unlawful Means, in suborning Witnesses against him ; this would have been a just Ground for an Accusation, and, if proved, would have rendered him worthy of Death. Even *Pilate*, who from a Knowledge of his Innocency endeavoured to release him, would have quickly dispatched him, as a Deceiver of the People, and a Rebel to the Roman Government.

If the Completion of some Prophecies doth not appear to be clear in every Circumstance, when the Pretensions thereto are confirmed by the Testimony of Miracles, and the undoubted Completion of others, what Doubt can remain ? A Person not vainly conceited of his own Wisdom, nor a Lover of Scepticism, but sensible of human Imperfections, would rather attribute the Difficulties that may arise, in accounting for any of these Events, either to his Ignorance of the Stile, or an Impropriety in the Translation ; to his Unacquaintance with certain Circumstances, or the Idioms and Phrases peculiar to the East, than immediately reject them as grievous Impositions upon the Understanding of Mankind. By a close and diligent Application to the Study and Knowledge of the eastern Languages, how many Difficulties, even Absurdities,

dities, in the present Translation of the Bible, have been removed : Prophecies, before obscure, made plain, the Misapplication of some corrected, and the Meaning of others established. It is not an unreasonable Concession, that Errours and Mistakes in our Translation, not wilful nor designed, must have been unavoidable. The Variety of Allusions to Rites, Ceremonies, Customs, Manners, and proverbial Sayings of different Nations, of *Syrians, Arabians, Ægyptians, Chaldeans, Samaritans, Hebrews*, and *Gentiles*, must undoubtedly occasion some Difficulties : These are not easily obviated, as they may require not a mere Knowledge of, but an Intimacy with the several Languages, which cannot be attained without much Labour, the Arabic Language alone being extremely copious and extensive*. Should not Men therefore forbear rash or severe Censures against any Expressions in the sacred Writings, neither confidently condemning, nor impiously ridiculing them, because those Expressions, if rightly understood, as it hath frequently happened, might appear to be very correct and just.

This Evidence of Prophecies hath been thought of such Weight for Christianity, that

* It having, as said, no less than seven Hundred different Words to signify a Sword.

Persons of a deistical Turn of Mind have most assiduously laboured to destroy the Authority of the Jewish Writings, and have treated the Law as the Produce of human Policy and Invention. Granting that it was, yet as the Jews, both ancient and modern, ever believed and acknowledged it to have been of divine Original, and certain Predictions were contained in their sacred Books concerning an extraordinary Person, who at a certain Time was to come into the World, and do such and such Things, the Application of those Predictions by Jesus, if they were fulfilled in him, cannot be deemed impertinent, and the fulfilling them was absolutely necessary for the Conviction of a People so superstitious, and so zealously attached to their own religious System. Notwithstanding all the Banter and Ridicule, the hard and unjust Censures thrown out against the Law and the Prophets, of which certain Writers, unbecoming of their Station and Profession, have been very free and liberal, it may be sufficient to say, that their Authority was principally confirmed by Miracles, to establish a pure and holy Worship, to prevent Idolatry and Superstition from becoming universal, to recommend the Practice of Virtue and Piety, and

and to discountenance Immorality and Impiety.

One of the strongest Proofs of their Authority may be drawn from the Character given of the Jewish Nation, so infamous and dishonourable, that no People, unless they were Idiots or professed Libertines, void of Understanding, or lost to every Thing virtuous and good, if they had not been fully and rationally convinced of it, would have permitted it to continue upon Record. They are described as an idolatrous, superstitious, rebellious, obstinate, ungrateful, wicked People. What a vile Character is this! Yet a very just one according to their own History. A Character which, as it made them ridiculous and contemptible in the Opinion of the rest of Mankind, would certainly have been erased out of their sacred Books, if they had disbelieved or harboured the least Suspicion of the Authority, either of the Founder of their Religion, or their Prophets. These Observations, concerning the Authority of Judaism, will be deemed by the candid satisfactory; with others, Controversy is both endless and useless.

To shew the Completion of each Prediction in the Person of Jesus is unnecessary, because it hath been already done by various

Writers. It may not be improper to take Notice of a few, which had none other Completion.—*The Seed of the Woman shall bruise the Serpent's Head.* Christ was literally of the Seed of the Woman. The Serpent's Head, which signifies the Power of Satan, was crushed at his Appearance, by the Conversion of the Heathen from Wickedness, Superstition, and Idolatry, by silencing his Oracles, and expelling him out of human Possessions.—*Abraham was to be a Blessing to all Nations.* Christ, being of the Seed of *Abraham*, was so, by the gracious and comfortable Truths he revealed to Mankind, by atoning for their Sins, and offering to them Life and Immortality.—*There was to be a Prophet like unto Moses.* None but Christ so appeared, who confirmed his Pretensions by Miracles, vastly superior, both in Grandeur and Goodness, to those of the Jewish Legislator.—*The Messiah was to be born of a pure Virgin.* In Christ alone was this Prophecy fulfilled.—*He was to be despised, rejected, cut off, numbered with the Transgressors in his Death, and to suffer for the Sins and Iniquities of Mankind.* Were not these Things fully verified in Christ? The History of his Sufferings shews it.—*He was styled the Councillor, Wonderful, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.*
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That these Titles belonged to him, his instructing Mankind in their Duty, his Birth, Office, and Miracles, his Claim to an Equality with the Father, his expiating the Guilt of Man, preventing its Punishment, and reconciling him to the Favour and Love of the Deity, undeniably prove. There are many other Prophecies, which, besides these mentioned, when compared with the Life and Actions of Christ, will be found to have had as full and perfect a Completion.

The Evidence of the Christian Religion hath been now considered, the End of which, being the Instruction and Happiness of Man, was highly worthy of the supreme Being. If this is the End of Christianity, as will plainly appear upon the most strict Examination of its Contents, what should Occasion an Opposition to it? Is the Evidence offered in Support of its Authority defective, or false? Can any Truth be better, or stronger attested? Are any of its Precepts immoral, or its Doctrines impious? Are not the Duties it enjoins consistent with Reason, and what is acknowledged to be worthy of being practised? Is the Use of any Thing prohibited, which can render Life agreeable and comfortable? Is any other Restraint laid upon human Actions, than what seems necessary to guard against
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and prevent that Wretchedness and Misery, which the Indulgence of the Passions and Appetites would produce?

What is there in this System, for human Reason to find fault with? For what Purpose do Men labour to subvert its Authority? Is any Religion better calculated to promote and secure the Good of Society, which requires Men to live peaceably and orderly, honestly and soberly, and to pay all just and proper Obedience to Persons in Power? Doth any Religion give greater Encouragement to Virtue, in proposing a Reward of everlasting Bliss and Glory? Can any Argument be so powerful to dissuade Men from the Practice of Vice, as the Threatning of eternal Punishment? Would it be possible, without this Reward and this Threatning, to keep Men within the Bounds of Decency? Abolish Christianity, and the Consequence would be a general Licentiousness.

To what Cause shall we attribute the Dislike and Aversion, which some Men have expressed against it? Are they, agreeable to their Profession, the Friends of Mankind? How then can they be Enemies to Christianity? Why do they deride, ridicule, and make a Jest of it? If it may not be suspected of all, it may

may be asserted with Truth of most of these Persons, that their Enmity principally proceeds from Libertinism. Let their Lives contradict the Assertion. Before they boldly presume to blaspheme, let them shew themselves to be good Men, and their Prejudices will subside. They are not here blamed for a Freedom of Inquiry, but a Partiality to their own Sentiments : If such a Freedom had been always properly exerted, there would have been less Errour, Superstition, and Enthusiasm in the Christian World. In every Age of the Church there hath been Cause for lamenting the Weakness of Mankind, in implicitly receiving, zealously adhering to, and violently maintaining the Dictates of others, rather than making Use of their own Understanding. The Priests of all Professions have aimed at a Power over Mankind of determining, instead of informing and directing their Conscience. It hath been owing in some Measure to an Infallibility in their own Way of thinking, that Men who have compared their Notions with the Doctrines of Christianity, have found such a Disagreement between them, as to have occasioned them to entertain an indifferent Opinion of both.

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At this Time it may be Matter of Surprise, that we should hear of any Exceptions against Revelation. It should rather be thought, after the many Books written, and the excellent Defences which have appeared, that the Truth of Christianity was fully established, and Deism for ever silenced: But we do not find this to be the Case. Books are written to depreciate and lessen its Authority, which will never want Readers and Admirers, so long as Vice hath the Ascendancy over Virtue, and Men are Lovers of Pleasure, more than Lovers of God. From this Cause, it may be supposed, Deism originally sprung, and to the same Cause the Progress it hath made, since its Commencement, may be ascribed.

It hath been said indeed, that the Weight of Education and the Dread of the Civil Power, not a Conviction of the Truth and Reasonableness of Christianity, determine its Professors in its Favour. By Virtue of what Power did Christianity make its Way, when both the Civil and Ecclesiastical Power was employed against it, not only at its first Publication, but for four Centuries after? What Influence had Education to make Christians, when that hindered its Reception amongst the Jews,

Jews, and raised so many Persecutions against it by the Heathen? Do not the sensible and understanding believe Christianity, not because it is a national Religion, and they were trained up in it, but as containing evident Marks internally and externally, internally by Prophecies, externally by Miracles, of divine Authority? No serious and good Man ever complained of this Prejudice of Education.

If a Man believes implicitly, on Account of the Principles having been early instilled into him, that doth not prove his Faith to be wrong, though he may be said to be weak. There is so little to fear from an Inquiry into the Principles of Christianity, that he who doth inquire, will in all Probability become a sincere and true Christian. Scripture recommends such an Inquiry, and few, if any, unless they have been first prejudiced against it, but have received the highest Satisfaction from it: Such have found it to be a reasonable, just, and holy System, worthy of its divine Author, useful and beneficial to Man.

That the Profession of Christianity is merely local and national, not founded on its Reasonableness, is further argued from prejudicing Youth in its Favour, by educating them in the Principles

Principles of it*. It is not owing to any Want of or Defect in its Evidence, that this early Method of Instruction is adopted: The general Good of Society, and the particular Welfare of Individuals require it. If such Education was neglected, what but Disorder and Confusion with every evil Work would ensue? Facts prove that such Consequences would happen. Is it not necessary, that Youth should be taught something? Can any better Notions be instilled than those, which when of Age will be serviceable to themselves, and useful to Society? Can it be deemed unlawful, or afford just Matter of Complaint, to prejudice them in Favour of what may make them good Men and good Subjects? Is not this much

* It is absolutely necessary to have some Religion. Human Laws would be defective and ineffectual in the Support of Virtue and restraining Vice, unless the Belief of a God and a future State, founded on a divine Communication, were admitted. The ancient Legislators were so sensible of this, that they always pretended to a divine Communication for the Laws they delivered, and the People received them on Account of the Reasonableness of such Pretension. All Men ought to submit to that Religion, which the Civil Power hath established, and to treat it with outward Respect and Reverence, whatever private Sentiments they may entertain of it. It is not insinuated, that Falshoods and Absurdities should be credited and acknowledged as divine Truths: Such should be detected, exploded, and given up. No Falshoods and Absurdities can be found in the Christian System, nor is there any known Religion superior or equal to it; as, therefore, it is a reasonable System, and the National Religion, no one can justify himself in not receiving, much less in ridiculing it.

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better than to leave them to themselves, exposed as a Prey to Vice and Folly, and to be the Cause of their becoming loose, disorderly, and wicked.

This indeed is instilling of Prejudices. It is, however, a pardonable Errour to instill such, whether true or false, which will certainly promote their Happiness in Life. When arrived at Years of Discretion, they are under no Necessity of adhering to those Principles; at that Age they are at full Liberty to judge for themselves.

The Cause of Christianity, it hath been said, hath greatly suffered, since the Revival of Letters. However fatal the Period, when Learning was revived, and the Mist of Error and Ignorance dissipated, none have any Cause to lament these Events but the Papists, whose pious Frauds and fabulous Stories have been detected and exposed, and whose Wealth and Power have been considerably curtailed and lessened by that Means. Their Falshoods and Superstitions were founded upon the Ignorance and Credulity of the People; who were susceptible of any Impression, because wanting a Capacity for discerning the Imposition. Hath Learning contributed to the Support and Establishment of Popery? Hath it not diminished

diminished the Number of its Friends, and delivered many States from that Thralldom, Tyranny, and Superstition, which had for many Centuries exercised itself over the Reason, and governed the Conscience of Mankind? Learning, though abused in bold Disputations concerning the Authority of Religion, hath never been able to do it any real Injury; but on the contrary much good, from the excellent and unanswerable Defences that have appeared in its Favour.

That Christians have been, and may still be amused into a Belief, rather than satisfied of the Importance of Christianity, may be true of Papists: If any such are found amongst Protestants, the Fault lies with themselves. Are not the Scriptures in their Possession? Are they not open to free Inquiry? Is implicit Faith required? Christianity wants no false Aid, no Priestcraft to support it. Every one may read and judge for himself.

He that hath a sincere Regard for Virtue and Piety, will never complain of his being a Christian, for nothing can more forcibly recommend the Practice of it, than Christianity: Supposing it therefore to have been the Invention of Priests, are they not Society's best Friends? Do they not deserve Praise and Commendation,

Commendation, rather than Censure and Ridicule, for enforcing Precepts, which, if observed, will make Men peaceable and orderly, prevent Disorders and Disturbances in the State, and cement Harmony and Love amongst Individuals? Such a Friend as this is not the Man, who attempts to raise, or encourages Suspicions of its Authority. Allowing it to be suspicious, would not he shew himself to be the Friend of Man and the Publick, to conceal what he knows, since the Publication of it would remove such a Restraint upon vicious Gratifications, as would not be in the Power of Civil Laws to supply.

The Lives of Christians have been made an Objection to Christianity. If they believed it to be true, why do they not act agreeable to its Laws? If they know that they are to give an Account hereafter, why do they not live as becometh Men, who are so to do? For the same Cause that Men, who know the Penalties annexed to the Transgression of the Civil Laws, transgress them; their Lusts get the better of their Reason. Christianity can no more be justly condemned, because some of its Professors are wicked, than the Laws be censured, because so many daily violate and infringe them.

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Every Christian is at Liberty to act, as he pleases: His Duty is clearly expressed. Allowing Temptations to be inviting and alluring, he hath sufficient Power to withstand them, if he will use as much Diligence to avoid, as to fall into them. It is certain, that since the Publication of Christianity the Lives of Men have not been so vicious and immoral, as before it. Mankind in general have been more honest, virtuous, and good, than in the Times of Pagan Ignorance and Idolatry. If we compare the Lives of Christians with the Lives of those, who alledge this as a reasonable Exception against the Truth of Christianity, the Ballance will be greatly in Favour of the former. It is not uncommon to see Men acting in direct Opposition to their Principles. Views of Interest, Pleasure, and Ambition, have a great Influence over Mankind, and frequently determine them to act differently from what they intended, and contrary to their Duty. No Profession whatever merits Censure, because its Professors are wicked.

Notwithstanding the Raillery and Declamation, the Laughter and Ridicule, in which the Adversaries of Christianity abound and are expert, it will always be too hard for them
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to kick against the Pricks. Christianity will ever be superior to the vain and weak Attacks of those, who when they seem to reason, are inconsistent with themselves, and when they cannot disprove Facts, confidently deny them.



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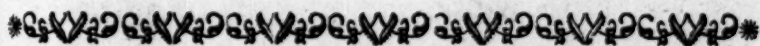
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THE
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OF THE
WRITINGS of the NEW TESTAMENT.



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THE Subject to be considered is of the most interesting Nature, and of the greatest Importance to Mankind. It is not only necessary, that we should be satisfied of the divine Authority of Christianity, but be assured that what we believe to be, is the pure Word of God, and hath been preserved and handed down to us, through the several Ages of the Church, uncorrupt. It becometh every Christian, and it is his Duty, to make a strict Inquiry into this Matter, lest he should receive human Traditions for the Work of divine Inspiration, and his Faith and Hope should not be built upon a solid and rational Foundation.

Great hath been the Wickedness of Mankind in all Ages. No Laws whatever can deter or prevent the Commission of the basest Crimes, if Men are influenced to commit them from the Views of Interest, Profit, or Pleasure. It is fit and proper therefore to examine the sacred Writings with Modesty and Candour, and to see if they have not been corrupted by bad Men, to serve iniquitous Purposes. Falshood hath often put on the Appearance of Truth, and the Deception hath been so strong, that it frequently hath been mistaken for it: No one therefore is deserving of Censure, who shall examine into the Genuineness and Inspiration of the New Testament; which should not be allowed to be of divine Authority on Account of its Usefulness, but its Truth. There are not wanting sufficient Reasons to prove its Contents to be authentic, and so transmitted; allowing for those Mistakes, which have occurred, in all Manuscripts of long standing, through the Carelessness of Transcribers, and the Ignorance of Translators. These Mistakes however have never been admitted, by the candid and ingenuous, to lessen or injure the Credit of the Authors.

To none do the Works and Ways of God appear so gracious and glorious, as to those
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who have studied them. It is owing to a Neglect of this Study, that the Faith of Men is so easily perverted, and their Morals corrupted; if the Scriptures were carefully and diligently read, they would not readily quit their Integrity, nor would the Purity of their Faith be vitiated, either by the proud and scornful Words of Unbelievers, or the windy and deceitful Doctrines of Enthusiasts.

The Knowledge of the Christian Revelation was not to be confined to the Time, when it was first published: Mankind in every succeeding Age, during the Continuance of the World, was to be acquainted with it. The grand Truth of the Gospel, *of Christ's being the Saviour of the World*, was necessary to be universally known: Tradition was an uncertain Method of communicating or preserving that Knowledge; by it sacred Truths would have been liable to Abuse, Corruption, and Misrepresentation, and in Process of Time would have been obscured, if not entirely lost, through human Weakness, Ignorance, and Wickedness. This Sentiment is confirmed by the Idolatry and Superstition which prevailed in the World, owing to the Tradition of the Unity of the Supreme Being, (the only Method of conveying Knowledge in the primitive Ages) being adulterated, or obliterated.

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If this Truth had been recorded, there could not have been such a general Apostacy, nor would so much Impiety and Irreligion have appeared in the World.

Another Method of conveying the Knowledge of divine Truths might have been by a personal and immediate Revelation. As Christianity was a System addressed to the Understanding of Mankind, and they were to be accountable for their Actions, this Method would have been improper, because it would have laid a Restraint upon human Liberty, by determining Men to believe and receive, whatever was so communicated. Though it might have been useful in preventing Enthusiasm, it was unnecessary, because the Frauds and Impositions of Enthusiasts and religious Impostors, however successful they may be for a Time, will be easily detected, when brought before the Tribunal of Reason, and the Test of the Sacred Scriptures.

A more certain and consistent Method of conveying the Knowledge of divine Truths was, *by Writing*: By this Mankind sensibly knew, what they were to believe, and what to rely upon; and could not, unless they themselves were willing, be imposed upon or deceived by Impostors, or pretended Revelations. In compiling a Work of such Moment

ment and Benefit to Mankind, is it an unreasonable Concession to allow, that the Authors were under the immediate Guidance and Direction of the Supreme Being, to prevent them from delivering any Thing false and absurd, and to assist their Memory concerning those Acts and Sayings of Christ, which were intended to be the Foundation of the Christian's Belief to the End of the World? Without this supernatural Assistance these Matters would not have been expressed with that Clearness, Accuracy, Simplicity, and Energy, as was necessary to guard against the least Suspicion of Fraud, to give a general Satisfaction, to be upon a level with every Capacity, and to excite the Regard of the wealthy and powerful. If the Writers of the Gospels and Epistles had been left to themselves, what but Errours, Absurdities, and Nonsense could have proceeded from Persons, well known to have been extremely weak, ignorant, and illiterate: Their Writings could not have merited the least Attention, would have been considered as idle Tales, and long ago buried in Oblivion.

There is a surprising Harmony and Agreement between the four Evangelists. There are none of those Mistakes and Contradictions, which, as they happen, without Exception,
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in different Writers upon the same Subject, might have been expected in their Writings. This Difference is easily accounted for; the one having, what the other wanted, the Aid of divine Inspiration to conduct the Pen. Allowing them not to have been inspired, their Narrations appear with Credit superior to any other Historians, though they were infinitely inferior to them in Abilities and Genius. In either Respect the Adversaries of the Christian Cause cannot justify themselves for the light Treatment of their Characters, and the Contempt shewn to their Writings.

False Doctrines were propagated, and erroneous Accounts of the Life and Actions of Christ were published, soon after his Death. The Apostles saw with Concern their dangerous Tendency to subvert the pure Faith, and to render the Truth of Christianity suspected. Hence it became necessary to commit to Writing a true and faithful Account of these Matters, as a standing Barrier for future Ages against the Designs of the Wicked, and fully to set forth what Men were to believe, to do, to hope for, and expect. Without this Standard, what Disorder and Confusion must have arisen in the Church of Christ. If in the Apostles Time Christians swerved from the Faith, and believed strange Doctrines, how much

much more would Heresies of all Kinds have abounded in succeeding Ages, if there had been no written Testimony of the Truth. If the most extravagant and impious Opinions have been advanced with Success, notwithstanding Reason was against them, and Religion condemned them, how amazingly extensive would have been their Success, if we had been destitute of this Criterion of Truth, the holy Scriptures? What Absurdities do the Papists credit, what Superstitions do they give into, because they are not permitted the free Use of the sacred Oracles: In how much worse Situation would the whole Christian World have been, if it had been left without them.

The Gospels appear to have been the Work of Inspiration, as they contain Matters unknown to and undiscoverable by human Reason: Such were the Appointment of Christ to be the Saviour of Mankind, the Unity of the Deity, and the Certainty of a future State. The Contents also of the Epistles, in which the Nature, Manner, and Sufficiency of our Redemption are described, shew them to have proceeded from the same divine Author. The Gospels were particularly written to shew the Evidence of the Christian's Faith; the Epistles to give to him a perfect and complete Rule
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of Life: Inspiration in both these Respects was necessary, that there might not be any Want of Satisfaction in the one, nor any Deficiency in the other. It is unreasonable to suppose, that the moral Duties mentioned were intended only to oblige those, to whom the Epistles were inscribed: They were general, and what all Christians in all Ages were to observe, and Persons committing the same Vices were to be reputed equally guilty, and deserving of Punishment. It becometh all Men to be holy, pious, and good. The Practice of Piety, Holiness, and Goodness, with every Virtue, cannot be confined to any particular Age; what the Apostles therefore enjoined their Converts to observe, is, by the same Authority, and for the same Reasons, enjoined every Christian.

Who knoweth the Will of God, except the Lord, and he to whom he shall be pleased to reveal himself? From this Authority are the Laws delivered by the Apostles derived: They have evident Marks of divine Wisdom, being strictly holy and good; containing nothing immoral, nor impious; giving not the least Encouragement to any Thing indecent and bad; not only commanding the Words and Actions, but even the Thoughts, to be chaste and pure. The Persons who delivered these

Laws,

Laws, must have been inspired, otherwise they would not have been prescribed: They would have been more adapted to the Weakness and Imperfections of human Nature, and the Writers (being sensible of its Proneness and Inclination to do wrong,) would have been more favourable to its Vices. But in these Writings, though Pardon is offered to the greatest Sinner, not the least Sin escapes without a just Censure and severe Rebuke: An universal Obedience to the divine Laws is required, no partial Compliance permitted, and no Wickedness whatever allowed of, or connived at. Will the Writings of the ancient Philosophers, taken collectively, furnish us with such noble, grand, and just Sentiments of the Deity, or such a clear, comprehensive, and reasonable System of Morality, as are to be found in the Writings of the New Testament? That there is such a sensible and material Difference, must be allowed by the candid Examiner, which Difference arises from a supernatural Cause in the Authors of the latter. The Writings of the Apostles, if they had attempted to write, allowing them not to have been inspired, would have proved vastly inferior in Sentiment, Expression, and Sense, to those of the Heathen Moralists.

That these inspired Writings are transmitted to us genuine, may be reasonably presumed.

sumed from their having been universally approved of, allowed, and acknowledged in every Age of the Church from its Foundation. Other Gospels were written, but, from the known Falshoods inserted by their Authors, they were of no Value, nor Authority, soon detected, exploded, and expired. May not Alterations and Corruptions have been attempted upon those Gospels, which are allowed not to be spurious? Not with any Probability of Success. True and exact Copies of the Originals were taken, and sent into those Parts, where Christianity had been received, or was propagating. With the same Exactness and Truth they were transcribed, sent to, and dispersed amongst private Families. To have proceeded therefore regularly, and effectually to have altered and corrupted the Text, the several Copies, which had been transcribed, must have been collected together. This was not an easy Matter to accomplish: The Multitude of Copies in being must have rendered the Attempt, if it had been made, impracticable. Various Heresies indeed sprung up in the Church, which to countenance and support the Sense and Meaning of the Scriptures were wrested and perverted: But the Scriptures themselves underwent no material Change or Alteration. This appears from those Passages,

sages, for and against the Doctrine of the Trinity and the Divinity of Christ, continuing unaltered; which early occasioned warm and fierce Contentions in the Church, (not yet subsided) carried on with a Spirit of Cruelty and Persecution unbecoming the Professors of Christianity. The corrupting the sacred Text would have served to strengthen the Cause of either Party: But as this could not have been done with such Secresy, as the Fraud required, we may safely acquiesce in and admit its Genuineness and Authority.

It is not insinuated, that the sacred Writings are entirely free from Errors; they were unavoidable by the Inaccuracy of Transcribers. If the Art of Printing had been in Use at that Time, they might have been prevented, or they would have been fewer in Number. All Books of ancient Date, prior to that Invention, have undergone the same Fate: To have guarded against it, there must have been a perpetual Miracle, which doth not appear to be necessary, since we find no fundamental Errour in the Doctrines or Precepts of Christianity, and by the Labours of the learned and ingenious, Mistakes have been rectified according to the Rules of fair Criticism, to the Satisfaction of weak Minds, the exposing of the designedly Ignorant, and the Confu-

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sion of the Wicked. If some Men as earnestly endeavoured to rectify, as to discover Mistakes, they would appear more candid, and prevent the Ridicule, of which they are so profuse against the Scriptures, being turned upon themselves. The various Readings that have been collected together, have served greatly to elucidate several Passages, and References to the Meaning of the original *Greek*, according to the best Writers in that Language, have cleared the Text from many gross Absurdities, occasioned by a well meant but inaccurate Translation.

It may be asked, how do we know, that the Writings we have, are the Writings of the Apostles? By the same Way that the Works of ancient Authors are known to belong to them, by the concurrent Testimony of Writers, who lived near their Time, and were capable of acquiring a certain Knowledge of their Authenticity, either from such who were but one Remove from those, who were well acquainted with the Originals, or conversed with the Writers themselves. The general Reception they have met with from wise and good Men in every succeeding Age, since the Decease of their Authors, and their Contents being worthy of our Belief and Practice,

Practice, may be considered as corroborative Proofs of their Genuineness.

If on Account of some Mistakes, which Length of Time and the Inaccuracy of Transcribers may have occasioned, Writings are to be rejected as spurious, what Writings could be looked upon as genuine? If the sacred Writers are objected to, because, from the Multitude of Alterations made *, and continually proposing to be made in their Works, their Sense seems not to be fixed, have not the best Classical Authors been treated in the same Manner, yet the Credit of their Writings not diminished, nor injured.

The Time when the Gospels were published, is a Proof of their Genuineness. Had the Publication been suspended, 'till the Persons were dead, who had the Power of detecting the Falshood, or in a Place where no Intelligence could be had of the Truth of their Contents, or in a Language which their Adversaries did not understand, Suspicions of a Fraud would have been reasonable and just: But no such Charges can be brought against the Evangelists. *St. Mathew* wrote his Gos-

* If Attempts of this Kind were fewer, the Cause of Christianity would not be the worse for it. The strange Criticisms of some Men upon the Writings of the Old Testament have brought it into great Discredit, and rendered it the Subject of much Contempt and Ridicule.

pel about twenty Years after the Death of Christ, and published it at Jerusalem, in a Language not unknown to the Jews, in the Place where the Facts mentioned were wrought, and at a Time when living Witnesses could have been produced, either to prove or confute his Assertions.

The Writings of the Apostles do not appear to have been contradicted in the Age when they were published. To say, that such Writings have been suppressed, is a false, invidious, and scandalous Imputation; the desperate Effort of a bad Cause. By whom were they suppressed? By the Writers? What Power, Interest, or Influence had they, who were poor, contemptible, and of low Estate? The Jews, their implacable Enemies, who stirred up the Magistracy against them in every Place, could easily have prevented such Suppression. They who were so free with and full of false Accusations, would have gladly embraced the Opportunity of accusing them justly; but they could not deny, nor disprove the Facts, therefore they were never wrote against: If they were, it belongs to those who assert it, to acquaint the World with the Names of the Authors, the Time when they wrote, and the Subjects treated of. If some Men will dispute Facts well attested upon
Record,

Record, we have certainly an equal Right, but more Reason, to dispute Reports, which exist only in Imagination, and to which the most obstinate and determined Malice give Birth. To ascribe the Suppression of these imaginary Writings to a Zeal for Christianity, is a mean and base Suggestion. Adversaries to Christianity of more distinguished Parts and Abilities, than this last Century hath produced, there have not been: Yet their Writings have not been suppressed. And why? Because Christianity is founded on Truth, and will bear the most strict Inquiry. Cavils and Objections have not weakened, but considerably strengthened its Authority, by the excellent Defences they have produced in its Vindication.

The Writers of the New Testament had no End to serve by forging the sacred Writings, nor Posterity by receiving them. Christianity gives no Encouragement to human Pride and Ambition, nor doth it promise to Men the Pleasures and Enjoyments of this Life; it promises indeed every Thing necessary, but nothing superfluous, and endeavours to wean off our Affections from this World, that we might place them where our Reward will be. Did the Apostles reap any worldly Advantages from their Ministry? Many were the Hardships, Afflictions, and

Distresses which they suffered, being in every Place persecuted and tormented. No Traces of the Wealth or Power, which they had acquired by the Propagation of Christianity, can be discovered. Is it then consistent with Reason and the Feelings of Nature, that Men should thus voluntarily expose themselves to the most severe and cruel Sufferings, without any particular Views, unless they had a positive Assurance of the Truth of what they attested? Doth it appear credible, that Christians, in the following Ages, would have sacrificed present Happiness, and chearfully submitted their Bodies to more than savage Tortures, unless they had received sufficient Evidence, and been fully convinced, that the sacred Writings, the Foundation of their Faith and Hope, their Consolation in Distress and Affliction, were pure, genuine, and uncorrupt? No Man, in Matters particularly respecting himself, should rely upon the Testimony of another, who may have been imposed upon or deceived; yet when the Testimony given is supported by the pious and holy Lives, and sealed with the Blood of the Writers, we may safely credit it.

Manuscript Copies of the original Writings of the New Testament may be traced back to the third Century. If the Writers of those
Times,

Times, and of the Ages preceding them, speak of and quote them according to the Copies now in our Possession, what good Reason can be assigned, why we should not believe them to be genuine? What other Proof have we, that the Works ascribed to ancient Writers really belonged to them? If we are to admit no Writings to be authentic, whose Originals cannot be produced, most of the Pieces of Antiquity, which contain Treasures of useful and valuable Learning, would be spurious. Let the sacred Writings be treated with the same Candour, and have the same Allowances, with other ancient Works, and their Authors will be found to have equal Merit, and not deserving of that Contempt and Ridicule, which some Men look upon themselves at full Liberty to treat them with.

If it was at first necessary to commit to Writing the Nature and Manner of Man's Redemption, the Evidence of its divine Authority, and the Duty required to be performed, as the conditional Means of securing that Blessing: Is it not probable, that Copies thereof should have been taken with the Approbation, and under the Inspection of the Apostles, or their joint Labourers and Ministers in the Gospel, and by their Direction

sent to all those Places, where Christianity had been preached, received, and established? Is it not also equally probable, that Writings of such Authority, being the Work of divine Inspiration, and containing Matters of the highest Importance, were most carefully preserved from the least Violence, Injury, or Alteration? It may therefore be fairly concluded, that no material Change (such a Change as may affect their Authority) hath happened to them, since the Time they were written. Do the present Copies contain any Thing contrary to Truth, inconsistent with Reason, or unworthy of their divine Author? Their Genuineness might be suspected, if any Thing was inserted improper for God to reveal, or absurd for Man to believe; if any of its Doctrines could be proved to be impious, or any of its Precepts unjust.

How, it hath been asked, can the Scriptures be the Word of God, when the most opposite, extravagant, and impious Opinions have been founded on the same Text, defended by their Authority, and have gained no little Credit? That there have been, and will be, weak and wicked Men in all Ages, who wants to be informed? That such would, the one by handling the Word of God deceitfully, the other ignorantly, give Birth to various

various Errours, is a Truth as well known. What then? Are the Scriptures false, because Men interpret and explain them according to their different Prejudices, Passions, Lufts, or Ignorance? Is it not common with Knaves, that their Schemes of Fraud might be more successfully carried on, to put on the Appearance of Sincerity and Truth? Will not Men, who have embarked in a bad Cause, endeavour to support and maintain it by Misrepresentations of a good one? If the Abuse of a Thing was allowed to be a sufficient Reason for laying it aside, there would be an End of Society, as well as Religion. For do not artful and designing Men shelter themselves under its Laws, and so pervert their plain and obvious Meaning, as to countenance and connive at those very Crimes, which they were purposely made to condemn and punish? Have not Persons, interesting themselves for the Preservation of Youth, and the Peace and Safety of the Community, in detecting certain Vices, been frequently greater Sufferers than the Offenders? Notwithstanding these Things are so, who will dispute the Authority of the Laws? Who can say, that they are not just and good? Who will attempt to prove them to be useless, because they have been applied contrary to their original Intention?

tion? It is impossible to guard against or prevent Abuses in any Thing, unless a Restraint was laid upon human Liberty: Such Abuses however neither lessen its Importance, nor destroy its Validity; if they were, then both human and divine Laws would be unnecessary and vain. Abuses of any Kind prove nothing more than this, *That their Authors have some Interest in them.* Is it extraordinary, where Interest is concerned, to see Fraud, Falshood, Injustice, and Violence, together with every mean, dishonourable, ungenerous, and base Art, practised to serve and promote it? Are the Scriptures therefore not the Word of God, because their Sense, to advance some private and worldly Views, hath been misrepresented? He that so thinks, falls little short of their Weakness or Wickedness, who misrepresent them. A Man, who should argue in this Manner against any other Science, Art, or Profession, would be looked upon either foolish or mad. If the Sense of the Scriptures hath been mistaken, not wilfully nor designedly, the Act is pardonable; if abused, the Persons so abusing it, not the Scriptures, are deserving of Censure; if Men of Piety and Learning have differed in their Explanations of them, this is only an Instance of human Weakness: Abuses, Mistakes, and Differences

Differences in Opinion affording no just and reasonable Foundation for Objections against them, nor proving them to be false.

That the Gospels are genuine, not forged, and contain a true and faithful Narrative of Facts, will appear from some particular Things mentioned. Men engaged in a bad Cause, always endeavour to provide against, whatever might have the least distant Tendency to raise Suspicions of their Credit and Veracity. It is the Business of Impostors, not to proclaim and publish, but to disguise and conceal the Truth. The Desertion of the Disciples upon the apprehending of Christ, *Peter's* Denial, *Judas's* Treachery, and the Apostles Doubts concerning his Resurrection, are Facts, which speak much in Favour of their Honesty and Integrity; which nothing but a strict Regard to Truth could have induced them to insert, and which would certainly have been omitted, if they had been concerned in any fraudulent Design of imposing upon Mankind.

To the Arguments alledged to prove the Inspiration and Genuineness of the Writings of the New Testament, the pious and holy Sayings they contain, the grand and sublime Ideas they give of the Deity, the Boldness of the Apostles in defending Christianity in the
Presence

Presence of its Enemies, the Facts mentioned (as all Facts should be) with Plainness and Simplicity, and the corroborating Testimony of Miracles, with the Completion of certain Prophecies, (foretold before, and completed after the Death of Christ) may be added. Upon the Whole it may be said, that no Book whatever is of so interesting a Nature to Mankind, none lays Claim to a greater Authority, and consequently none so well guarded against Errors and Corruptions.



SERMONS



S E R M O N S.

ON THE

A C C E S S I O N

Of his present MAJESTY

GEORGE THE THIRD.



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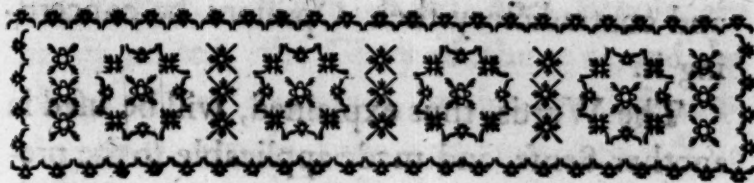
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Of his present M A J E S T Y

G E O R G E T H E T H I R D.

ISAIAH, Chap. xlix. Verfe 23.

And Kings shall be thy nursing Fathers.

HE Prophet here foretold the great
Success and Progress of Christianity,
that it would be the professed and
established Religion of many States and King-
doms, and enjoy the Support and Protection
of their Princes and Governors. This Pro-
phesy hath been fully completed; inasmuch
as Christianity is the national Religion of the
Powers of *Europe*, who are resolved to adhere
to, maintain, and defend it, however different
and

and contradictory their Opinions be concerning it.

The Words, thus explained, will be used in another Sense, and made applicable to the present Solemnity. This Day is rendered glorious by the Accession of a Prince, who is happy in possessing the Affections and Confidence of his People. Few Kings before him have enjoined this Happiness, which to be permanent and durable, he must continue, as the Text directs, *the nursing Father of his People*.

Kings are not constituted for the Good of themselves, but the Welfare and Prosperity of their Subjects: For those Purposes, and to protect from Violence and Oppression, are they set over the People; when they cease so to act, they commence Tyrants, and forfeit the Respect and Obedience due unto them.

Kings who are really such, who lavish not away the Treasure and Blood of their Subjects in Support of their Luxury, Pride, or Ambition; who give them not up to those worst of Tyrants bad Ministers; who by their own Example encourage Virtue and Piety, and are the Patrons of Merit and Goodness; who not only provide against Wrong in others, but are careful not to do any Wrong themselves, will always be carested, esteemed, and beloved: Such Kings are the Favourites of
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the People. When King and People are firmly united, the Glory of the one and the Happiness of the other, which are inseparable, must remain firm and unshaken: The selfish and iniquitous Designs of artful Sycophants will ever prove abortive, so long as a mutual Confidence is preserved. A King who reigns in the Hearts of his Subjects, hath nothing to fear nor dread from any Person, less than himself; he may do, may attempt, may dare any Thing, that will advance his own Grandeur, and promote the Prosperity of his Kingdom, without any effectual Opposition or Controul. In this Discourse I shall humbly endeavour to shew,

F I R S T.

The Duty of a King to his People, as *their nursing Father*.

S E C O N D L Y.

The Duty of the People to their King, as *his Children*.

T H I R D L Y,

Shall close the Subject with a suitable Application.

X

F I R S T,

FIRST, I shall humbly endeavour to shew the Duty of a King to his People, as *their nursing Father*.

It becometh the Parent to set a good Example to his Children; so should a King to his People. He cannot expect them to be virtuous and good, unless he himself is so: As is the Fountain, so are the Streams which issue from it. He cannot act with too much Caution and Reserve, as his Conduct will be narrowly watched, and his Foibles, when discovered, severely represented by the disappointed and discontented. It would be great Weakness in a Prince to enact Laws for the good Order and well Government of his Subjects, if he did not in his own Person observe them. Precepts are of little Use, when the Practice contradicts them. An Imitation of the Prince's Behaviour hath been always thought the best Recommendation to his Favour. It is a less Offence to Majesty to conform to the Disposition, than to oppose the Will of the Sovereign.

The Vices of a King are not only pernicious to the Morals of the People, but prejudicial to the Interest of his Crown. Good Men dare not approach him; his Servants must be, as he is, wicked; the Consequence of which is Rapine, Oppression, and Violence.

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The Subject suffers, and is burdened and oppressed by unnecessary Taxes and illegal Exactions, to support his base Pleasures, and to gratify the Avarice, or to supply the endless Wants of his Ministers of Riot. When a King fixes his Throne in Righteousness, and wicked Men are driven from his Presence, when he himself is pious and good, and makes Piety and Goodness a conditional Means of obtaining any Marks of his Favour, his Subjects, and those especially, who from their Merit and Abilities have any Thing to hope for and expect from him, will reverence and imitate the illustrious Example.

A G A I N.

It is the Duty of the Parent to provide proper Tutors for his Children, such as will have a Regard for, and faithfully execute the Trust reposed in them: So is it the Duty of a King to make choice of fit and able Ministers and Magistrates, to assist him in the Government of his People, and the Execution of the Laws. In the prudent and discreet Appointment of Governors depends the Safety of the State. Laws are of little Use, and the Authority which enacts them contemptible, if the Administrators are under the least Suspicion of Dishonesty and Corruption.

tion. *Jethro's* Advice to *Moses* deserves the Attention of the greatest Prince: *Provide*, saith he, *able Men, such as fear God, Men of Truth, hating Covetousness, and place such to be Rulers of the People.* Such Men a Prince should seek for, if he would have his Reign to be prosperous; such will do Honour to his Appointment, and secure the Peace of his Government.

Wicked Men, however great and extraordinary their Abilities, should never be permitted to have a Power of doing Hurt. How can they be proper Dispensers of Justice to others, who deserve Punishment themselves? Men who are declared Enemies to Virtue, must be very bad Protectors of it. Gifts and Rewards will easily bias and corrupt their Integrity and Impartiality, whose Vices and Extravagance have made them necessitous. The publick Welfare and the Dignity of the Sovereign will be sacrificed to their own private Advantage; every Thing will be made subservient to self, and to contribute to their Ease and their Pleasures. If Wisdom and Goodness are not found in Persons invested with Authority, as well as in the Prince, Disorder in the Body Politic must ensue, and every evil Work be practised with Connivance, if not with Impunity. Next therefore to the
being

being good himself, a King should take Care, that those who are in any Manner concerned in the Administration of Justice, or the Direction of national Affairs, should also be good: Otherwise it will be impossible to preserve his Subjects from Oppression, and to prevent himself from becoming odious.

A G A I N.

It is the Duty of the Parent to hear the Complaints of their Children, and to procure Satisfaction for the Wrongs they may unjustly suffer: It is the Duty also of a King to listen to, and redress the Grievances of his Subjects; to hear the Complaints of the Poor, and revenge the Injustice done them; to let no Man's Greatness protect him, nor any Man's Wealth screen him from Punishment; to let no Man's Power divert, nor any Man's Interest rescue him from the Hand of Justice. The greater the Offender, the greater the Offence, and the more his Guilt is aggravated, because he should be the Revenger, not the Conniver or Doer of Injustice.

It is impossible for a Prince to know the Abuses and Oppressions which prevail, unless his Subjects are permitted freely to address him: His Judgment is otherwise easily, and will be misled by base Insinuations;

which are always so framed as to have the Appearance of Truth. Wicked Men want not for Devices to conceal their Villainies : It is therefore of considerable and eminent Service to a King to be easy of Access at all Times, and to be ready and disposed to receive and hear the reasonable Requests of his People. It may be difficult to guard against all Injustice, yet by this Means there will be a Check and Restraint upon bad Men, and many Abuses of Government will be prevented, Men indeed will run great Hazards for the Acquisition of Wealth and Power, but the bare Possibility of a Discovery will intimidate some, and make others labour at the Concealment of their Iniquities, especially if sensible, that upon the Discovery they shall certainly forfeit the Favour, and incur the Displeasure of the Prince.

A G A I N.

It belongs to the Parent not to be too credulous in Reports concerning his Children, nor to shew himself partial towards them, but to let them all be equally Partakers of his paternal Care and Love: Thus should a King conduct himself towards his Subjects; he should have no Favourite, should esteem them all alike, and as it is necessary for the well
Government

Government of Society, that there should be Distinctions amongst its Members, should let those only partake of his Royal Bounty and Munificence, who shall merit it by an assiduous, diligent, and faithful Service to their Country. He should be no Abettor of Faction; Honesty, Integrity, and Ability should be the only Recommendations to his Esteem: Persons of such Accomplishments deserve his Protection and Favour, as they will undoubtedly prove of publick Utility, and reflect no Disgrace upon the Sovereign.

A partial Distribution of Royal Favours excites Animosities, kindles Jealousies, and occasions Divisions: Especially if those Favours should be bestowed without Desert, through Interest, or from private Views. The Destruction of Princes hath been principally occasioned by private Attachments. However distinguished the Merit of Favourites may be, the Nobles will not patiently suffer a Superiour in their Prince's Esteem, and such in the End are sure to be hateful to the People.

A King should not espouse any Party: It is hurtful to his private Peace, and the Interest of the State so to do. He may think by such Means to weaken the Power and Influence of his Opponents, not considering that at the same Time he encourages them to sow the

Seeds of Discontent and Discord amongst the People. It is not the Principles, but the Actions, it is not what Men are represented, but what they openly appear to be, that should claim the Sovereign's Regard; and whilst he endeavours to keep Harmony and Union amongst his Servants, permitting none wholly to engross his Favour, the Glory of his Throne will be increased, and the Peace of his Government secured.

L A S T L Y.

It is the Duty of a Parent to preserve the Morals of his Children, to instruct them in the Principles of Religion, and secure to them all their Rights and Privileges: This also is the Duty of a King. He is to take Care that no Laws pass, which may be prejudicial to the Virtue, contrary to the civil and religious Rights, injurious to the Trade and Commerce, or destructive of the Freedom of the People. For these grand Purposes he is raised to the Throne, and highly exalted above his Fellows. A weighty and important Trust! For the Discharge of which Wisdom and Prudence, with Integrity and Uprightness of Heart, are necessary. No Prince who knows his true Interest, will ever abuse this Confidence placed in him: Such Abuse hath always proved fatal, both to
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the Sovereign and his Advisers. Illustrious will be his Reign, whose People live free: Full of Dissatisfaction, Murmures, and Complaints, generally terminating in Conspiracies, Insurrections, and Rebellions, will the People be, whose Freedom is attempted to be abridged, or enslaved. Having considered the Duty of a King to his People, as *their nursing Father*, we come,

SECONDLY, to shew the Duty of the People to their King, as *his Children*.

It is the Duty of Children to honour and reverence their Parents: It is also the Duty of Subjects to their Prince. They are to shew Respect and Deference to his Person in their Words and Actions: This is due to him. If the Person of the Legislator is held in Contempt, or talked of lightly and irreverently, his Laws will not have that Weight and Authority, which they ought to have. To expose the Foibles of the Prince, lessens the Publick's Esteem for him, and is an Encouragement to Vice. Kings are no more than Men; as such they have their Faults, but these should be carefully concealed from the Publick, because of the pernicious Influence they will unavoidably have upon the Morals of the Subject. The Power of that Prince is greatly lessened, whose Majesty is not
had

had in Reverence. We must entertain a mean Opinion of the Person, whom we speak of with Indifference. He can no more be said to be a dutiful and faithful Subject, than he be accounted a pious and sincere Christian, who talks of his Sovereign, or his Religion, in a loose and ludicrous Manner.

A G A I N.

It is the Duty of Children to obey their Parents: So is it of the Subject to obey his Prince. This Obedience consists in observing his Laws, in submitting to his Government, in acquiescing in the Measures he takes for the well managing and directing thereof, and (confiding in his Integrity) in supposing all Things done with a View to promote the publick Welfare, whatever may be the Event. This Obedience makes them to be candid in their Censures, prevents them from raising and encouraging Clamours, and disposes them to live peaceably and orderly, following their own Vocations and Callings, and leaving the National Affairs to the Conduct and Management of those, whom the Prince shall be pleased to intrust therewith.

Though the Subject may wish, he cannot be so weak to think, nor so ridiculous to expect, that his Prince will be always fortunate
and

and successful : When he is not so, he should not be less obedient or less confident, nor too hastily attribute Events to Neglect, Indolence, or Indiscretion, which human Wisdom could not have foreseen. When Events have happened, no great Penetration nor Skill are requisite to know, how they might have been prevented : But as numberless Incidents may occur, the true and certain Method of Prevention, 'till they have happened, is unknown. In this Respect it is great Weakness, as well as great Injustice, to reproach, either the Sovereign or his Ministers, for such Occurrences : It is the same as being angry with a blind Man for not seeing, or a deaf Man for not hearing.

Obedience to the Prince further consists, in respecting his Representatives the Magistrates of the Land, in assisting them in the Execution of their Office, in bringing Offenders to Justice, to suffer the Penalty which the Laws require, and their Crimes have deserved, in letting no Views of private Interest or Advantage occasion him to transgress the Laws himself, nor any partial Regard for his Friend be the Cause of conniving at or concealing the Transgression of them in another.

AGAIN.

A G A I N.

It is the Duty of Children to assist their Parents, when in Want of their Assistance, to the utmost of their Power and Ability: It is also the Subject's to his Prince. Whatever the Prince doth, is supposed to be for the publick Good, not to enrich and aggrandize himself, but his Subjects. The Grandeur and Glory of the Sovereign is centered in the Wealth and Happiness of his People; for the better Security of the latter, when absolute Necessity so requires, they ought freely and generously to supply him with the former. When obliged, for the Honour and Interest of the State, or to revenge the Wrongs and Insults of his Enemies, to commence a War, he should not be left destitute of the Means of carrying it on with Vigour. The Inconveniencies of War are many, but they should be chearfully submitted to, when the Measures pursued for procuring a proper and full Satisfaction are wise and just: Not to do this, is more injurious to the Subject than to the Sovereign, whose Glory indeed may be dimmed by it, but the Trade and Commerce of the other will be greatly hurt and much diminished by an inactive War, or a disadvantageous Peace. One or the other, if not both,
of

of these Evils must be the Consequence, if the Sinews of War are wanting: Taxes therefore, however severe, grievous, and burdensome, if the State and Situation of the Nation require them so to be, (which for a Time may distress, not oppress the Subject) should be willingly and peaceably complied with.

Nothing can be too much for Children to do for a kind and loving Parent: Nor Subjects for a good Prince. They may safely trust him with their Lives and Fortunes, for he will not hurt nor endanger the one, nor misapply and abuse the other: A small Recompence for the numberless Cares and Anxieties that daily surround the Throne of Princes. To govern well, is not an easy but an arduous Task; such who do, highly deserve the Crowns they wear: They are justly entitled to all that Subjects can do, or give.

Having considered the Duty of a King to his People, as *their nursing Father*, and the Duty of the People to their King, as *his Children*, we come

THIRDLY, To close the Subject with a suitable Application.

We have a King young in Age, Experience, and Government, yet discreet, wise, and discerning: His Accession to the Throne hath been with Unanimity and Applause, with
universal

universal Consent and Approbation, not a single Murmure heard, no Dissatisfaction shewn, in the midst of Victories, Triumphs, and Success; fortunate in the Possession of able and uncorrupt Ministers, and in having a brave, a free, a loyal People for his Subjects. How glorious may such a Prince be, how happy such a People! Let not then any base Insinuations, or the wicked Designs of the envious and malicious, blast this Prospect of permanent Happiness. Let us entertain no Jealousy nor Suspicion within our Breast, to lessen the mutual Confidence and Affection now subsisting between the Subject and the Sovereign: A Sovereign whose Glory, whose Pride, is the true Interest of his People. Assured of this, let us correct that national Fickleness and Inconstancy of Temper, which is apt to shew itself, upon every Alteration of Men and Measures, or any unprosperous Events, by breaking out into Censures, Exclamations, and Invectives, not the most decent, nor the most just. We are too apt to pass Sentence hastily, without weighing that Variety of complicated Circumstances, which is necessary to form a right Judgment of Things, and which if known and considered, would make us ashamed both of our Weakness and Folly, and

and also applaud and admire the Wisdom and Goodness of our Governors.

Faction, which had so long kept the Sovereign at a Distance from his People, is now no more; Jealousies and Suspicions are extinct: Instead of which a mutual Love and Confidence reign; a Circumstance which few Periods of our History can boast of. Let us ever retain in our Mind the great and glorious Events, which have followed upon it, and ineffectual and abortive will be the Attempts of wicked Men to dissolve the Union, so well established: By it this Nation may become as considerable and respectable for its Grandeur and Power, as ancient Rome. The Threats and Menaces of publick Enemies, or the more dangerous Conspiracies of private Enemies, it need not regard, nor fear: It knows how to punish the one, and divert the other. Firmly resolved to support the Dignity of our Sovereign and the Interest of our Country, with the Blessing of Providence, we are able with our own natural Force and Strength to secure ourselves, and to annoy any Enemy, that shall attempt to disturb our Peace.

When Kings were taught to believe their Subjects to be Rebels, and Subjects made to believe that their Kings intended to enslave them, however successful in War, however
prosperous

prosperous in Peace, we could not be said to be, either a great or an happy People. But the base, infamous, and selfish Designs of wealthy and powerful Sycophants having been fully seen into, detected, and contemned, there is nothing now to prevent or hinder us from being the greatest and most happy People in Europe. As a Means of becoming so, let us, in Imitation of the Royal Example, be pious towards God. Without Virtue and Goodness we cannot expect the national Happiness to be lasting. Sin is not only a Disgrace to a People, but weakens and enervates them, and is hurtful to Industry. We cannot look for the Continuance of the divine Assistance, unless we endeavour by an holy and good Life to deserve it: This in Gratitude for the good Success obtained we are obliged to. If then we have a real Value for the King, and are desirous of seeing this our Jerusalem in Prosperity all our Life long, let us walk stedfastly in the Ways of Godliness, living unblameably in the Sight of God and Man, as being the best Method for securing his Safety, procuring divine Blessings upon ourselves, and preserving the Peace of the Kingdom.

Let us, in Imitation of the Royal Example, distinguish Men according to their Merit and their Worth. Let us not, for any Consideration

fideration of Friendship or Interest, favour the Wicked or Undeserving. This will be an Encouragement to Men to be industrious and good, when they find that they shall meet with a suitable Reward, and will most effectually remove the frequent Complaints of Sloth and Indolence, when the slothful and indolent know, that they will be slighted and disregarded, if not punished.

Let us discountenance all evil Surmises, severe Sayings, subtle Insinuations, or mean Reflections, either against the Government itself, or Persons concerned in the Direction and Management of it: For these Things are of an evil Tendency, and will by Degrees alienate the Minds of the People, make them jealous of their Sovereign, destroy the Confidence they have placed in him, and be subversive in the End of the Peace and Welfare of the Nation.

As we should not be clamorous nor turbulent in the Time of Adversity, so we should take Care not to be licentious and profligate in these our Days of Prosperity. Luxury is more pernicious to a State, than the greatest Success of its Enemies: Nothing can be more effectual towards accomplishing its Ruin. We are in some Danger, from the Progress this Vice hath made within these few Years. Most

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People

People, from Pride and Vanity, which is both foolish and criminal, are fond of appearing above their Circumstances and Condition in Life. The honest and industrious have by this Means suffered, to the great Distress of some Families, and the total Impoverishment of others. We have seen the Beginning of this Vice, which may justly alarm us, from the many Bankruptcies and the numberless Frauds it hath occasioned: The End of it must be fatal, unless the Legislator interposes and prevents it, by enacting some Law to restrain the Extravagance of the People, and to confine their Expences within the Limits of their Fortune, Ability, Profession, or Station.

If such a Law had been made, we should not have read, with Amazement and Resentment, of the Clearance of such a Multitude of Debtors, nor have heard the piercing Complaints and Lamentations of honest and industrious Tradesmen, by this Means deprived of the Fruits of their painful Labours, and straitned, if not reduced, in their Circumstances. It is a strange Way of living in Credit, to live upon and consume the Property of other Men: It is certainly a most odious Sin in the Sight of God, as it is the Violation of Reason, Justice, and Humanity, as well as the Laws of Religion. Theft and Robbery
are

are Crimes that fall very short of it in Guilt, though their Punishment is much more severe: In some Cases Murder is more excusable; for the various Distresses and Miseries Families suffer through it, are often the Occasion of an immature or lingering Death to the innocent and unfortunate Sufferers; whose Miseries and Distresses (shocking to mention!) are made the Sport and Derision of these licentious and abandoned Villains. This Evil therefore of Luxury, of such pernicious Consequences both to the State and Individuals, it is hoped, will be speedily redressed, that there may be no complaining in our Streets, and Glory may dwell in the Land.

God grant, that Peace and Plenty, Honesty and Industry, Virtue and Loyalty may for ever reign amongst us; and that we may be an happy, virtuous, and religious People, under a wise, good, and merciful Prince.

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THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

St. Louis, Mo., June 10, 1906.

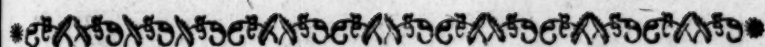
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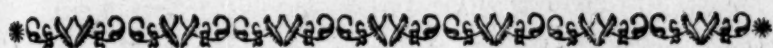
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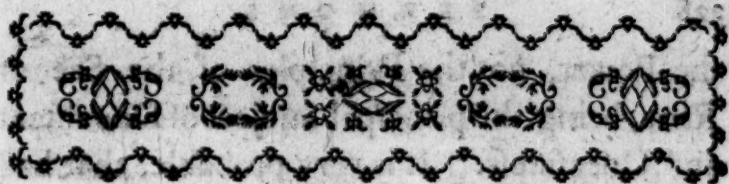
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DISCOURSE*
CONCERNING
POPE RY.

St. MATTHEW, Chap. xv, Verse 9.

*But in vain they do worship me, teaching for
Doctrines the Commandments of Men.*

THE Design of this Discourse is to lay
T open some of the principal Errours
of the Church of *Rome*, and to
shew the Difference between it and our own ;
by which the Corruption of the Former, and
the Purity of the Latter will be discerned,
and the Usefulness of the Reformation evi-
dently appear : To which political Resent-
ment, founded on a private Lust, gave Birth,
not a real Dislike and Aversion at that Time
to the Doctrines and Tenets of that Church ;

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* When preached, it was divided into two Parts.

the Power, not the Principles of the See of *Rome*, being the principal Subject of Discontent and Uneasiness. It is very probable, that had the Pope consented to the King's Request for the Divorcement, his Jurisdiction would not have been questioned, nor disputed. He had remarkably distinguished himself in Favour of the Pontiff, by writing in Defence of his Authority, when attacked by the Reformers abroad : And had his Lust, which would admit of no Controul, been indulged, he might have proved their Persecutor as well as Opposer, or at least would have prevented the Growth of Protestantism in his own Dominions. It is through the Reformation, that the Doctrines and Precepts of Christianity are taught and delivered in a more pure and just Manner, than in several Centuries before it, and our Mode of Worship more plain, simple, and innocent.

It is not from a pharisaical Pride of displaying our own Righteousness, and representing ourselves much better than the Papists, that their erroneous Tenets are exposed : For though in Principles we may be found to be better, in the Practice of Virtue and Piety we shall not, upon a strict and impartial Review, appear greatly superior. As Profelytes to the Roman See are daily making, its Priests too
numerous

numerous and very assiduous amongst us, and its Places of Worship increasing, it is highly necessary and expedient to examine their Principles, that we might be upon our Guard against any sudden and insidious Attack, lest we should hastily and inconsiderately embrace Opinions, dangerous to our civil Liberties, subversive of the Constitution, and destructive of the Purity and Simplicity of our Faith and Manners. Let it be remembered, that whatever is advanced, is levelled against the Doctrines of that Church, not against its Members: Many of whom are pious and good, and neither countenance, encourage, nor commend the Actions of their Party in any Measures, which are unreasonable, unjust, and violent.

Christianity, a Dispensation eminently divine, worthy of God to communicate and Man to receive, excellent and useful in its Doctrines and Precepts, by various Abuses and Corruptions, the natural Effects of frequent Innovations which crept into the Church, occasioned by the Pride, the Vanity, or the Ambition of the ruling spiritual Powers, and the aspiring Superiority of the Bishop of *Rome* over the Rest of the Bishops, sunk into Idolatry and Superstition. The plain Sense and obvious Meaning of the sacred

cred Writings were perverted and corrupted, to establish the most absurd Doctrines, and to recommend the most gross Errours. That such Doctrines and Errours should have gained any Credit, been believed, and universally received in the Christian Church, may seem surprising : But it doth not appear extraordinary, when the Times are considered, in which they were introduced, being those of Credulity and Ignorance, when the Generality of Men was incapable of inquiring into their Reasonableness or detecting their Falshood, and suffered themselves to be implicitly directed, and absolutely governed by Priests. Besides as the civil Power supported the Authority of the Church, and ecclesiastical Censures were inflicted, with corporal Punishments, upon those who opposed it, the People, through Dread and Fear, declined an Inquiry, and were compelled to submit to it. It is remarkable, that as Learning decayed, Corruptions in the Church became frequent, increased, prevailed, and were established, because they were found to be profitable. After the Revival of Letters, about the Time of the Reformation, some Powers in Subjection to the Roman See shook off the Yoke ; whose Example was soon followed by us. We have the Pleasure to observe, that many of the
Roman

Roman Catholic Powers are not at present so passive, nor so superstitious, as their Ancestors were.

Ancient *Rome* is equalled, if not surpassed by modern *Rome*, in exacting a Compliance with and Conformity to Opinions, not only condemned by Reason, but contradictory to the Evidence of Sense. She hath nearly copied and transcribed the idolatrous Practices of Paganism, corrupted and adulterated, into her religious Worship. Of what Prejudice she hath been to the Cause of Christianity, the reigning Ignorance and Superstition of her Converts, in those States and Kingdoms where her Power is acknowledged and fixed, afford sufficient Proof.

The Papists shew an indefatigable Zeal in the Propagation of Christian Knowledge : Their Clergy have been of Service and Use, by the Missionaries sent into foreign Parts, in converting many from gross Idolatries, and communicating the Knowledge of the one true God. If we inquire into the real Cause of this Zeal, it will be found to proceed more from a Desire of acquiring Wealth, and extending the Dominion of the Papacy, than a pure and sincere Regard for Religion.

Popery

Popery is a System of Religion the best contrived to enrich the Clergy, and impoverish the Laity. Every one knows that the Religious, in those States where Popery is the national Profession, are the most rich Subjects, possess the most lucrative Employments on the civil List, or considerably partake of the Profits arising from them, and by Trade and Commerce accumulate great Wealth. Their Churches and religious Houses are immensely rich with the numberless Offerings of pious Devotees.

The Church of England before the Reformation abounded in Wealth; which after the Reformation circulated in the proper Channel: It having been bestowed to reward the brave, the virtuous, and the good, Persons who had deserved well of their Country by singular Services in the Field, or Cabinet. Religious Houses were found, at the Time of their Suppression, to have been a Nursery for all Manner of Wickedness. It is difficult to say, which was the greater, the Wealth contained in them, or the Luxury, Ignorance, Indolence, and Vices of their several Masters. The Suppression, however, was carried to an Excess: For through it many of the Clergy have not at this Time a necessary Subsistence.

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There are Persons of that Persuasion remarkable for their Piety and Integrity, and in high Esteem for their Abilities and Learning. A fair Prospect seems to be opened here, for eradicating false Principles, and instilling true: But an Attempt to reform them, or to change their Sentiments, will be unsuccessful, on Account of the strong Prejudice of Education, national Religion, and the vigilant Zeal of the Priest.

As many of the Errours of that Church are obvious to Protestants of slender Parts and no Erudition, it may surprise, how they should have been so long maintained and supported: But the Priest, notwithstanding he may know better, is obliged to teach and preach, what the Church hath directed him, and the People are compelled to believe and receive, what he says, from a Dread of exposing themselves to the Resentment of the Civil Power, which upholds her Authority. What she arbitrarily commands, the other as arbitrarily enforces by sanguinary Laws, or permits the Ecclesiastical Power to inflict its own Punishments, which are generally more cruel, severe, and inhuman. It is however hoped, that their Reformation will be accomplished in due Time. We know a neighbouring Kingdom hath given up the Pope's Supremacy, and entertains

testains a mean Opinion of his Infallibility. We know that the principal Support of the Papal Power is almost extinct. The Order of Jesuits is now held in the greatest Contempt, which heretofore made the greatest Figure in every Court of Europe: They have been in all Ages, since their first Institution, concerned in the Intrigues of State, in Plots, Massacres, and Assassinations. If France and the rest of the European Powers were reformed, more pacific and less destructive Measures would be pursued by them: For religious Opinions would not then be, as now, the Plea for plundering and destroying, killing and murdering each other.

A Papist may ask, are there no Relicks of Popery to be found in your Church? Is it entirely reformed from our Errours and Corruptions? Is your Liturgy so pure and perfect, as not to be offensive and displeasing to any? It would be a Falshood to affirm it. The Divisions amongst Protestants plainly prove, that it is not thought to be so uncorrupt as it should be: Divisions upheld by some from a Spirit of Opposition, or the sordid View of Interest; in others, indeed, whose Lives are an Ornament, and whose Writings an Honour to Religion, Conscience is the Cause.

It

It is not the present Design to enter into the Merits of the Dispute between us, nor to shew, wherein they or we are right or wrong, but to lay open the popish Errours, which they will do us the Justice to say, that we neither believe, countenance, nor encourage. We hope to see the Time, when Protestants, now divided and at Variance, by giving up Punctilios and laying aside Formalities, observing what is reasonable and discarding what is unnecessary, will be happily united in their Sentiments; and the Animosities and Jealousies, which have so long subsisted, prejudicial to the true Interest of Religion, destructive of the Peace and Prosperity of this Kingdom, and so beneficial and advantageous to the Church of Rome, totally subside and be extinct.

The various Persecutions in which the Papists have been engaged, and the cruel Tortures they have inflicted upon Protestants, are bad Proofs of the Authority and Obligation of those Opinions, which by such Means they intended to establish and propagate. A Difference in religious Sentiments is no Foundation for Persecution. Protestants we know, of different Persuasions, have in this imitated the Example of *Rome*; those in Power afflicting and distressing the weaker Party. Religious Differences

Differences are to be settled with Temper and Moderation, and Opinions are to be recommended by Arguments drawn from Reason, and confirmed by Revelation, not forced upon Mankind by Threatnings, Imprisonments, and Acts of Violence.

History abounds with tragical Accounts of Plots, Assassinations, and Massacres, which the Church of *Rome* hath encouraged and entered into to support her Errours. The Inquisition, wherein Tortures the most acute and exquisite are inflicted upon the unhappy Victims of her Rage, shews of what a cruel Spirit she is. Do the sacred Writings authorize or approve of such Behaviour? Did Christ use any Force to compel Men to embrace his Doctrines? If it had been just and lawful so to have done, would he not have done it? Did the Apostles follow any other Method, in the Propagation of Christianity, than that of Exhortation and Persuasion, addressing themselves to the Reason and Understanding of Mankind? How inexcusable and criminal then are the Papists, who burn, lay waste, and destroy, Families, States, and Kingdoms.

The better to countenance and procure Credit to their erroneous Tenets, they have invented almost an infinite Number of Miracles: These have been conducted with so
much

much Art, as to have deceived and deluded, not the weak and credulous only, who are fond of the marvellous, and incapable of discovering a Fraud, but also Persons of no mean Understanding, who are apt to receive Reports with Jealousy and Suspicion, and led from mere Curiosity to examine into the Truth of Facts. These sham Miracles have given no little Advantage to Infidelity: The Friends of that Cause have from thence taken Occasion to burlesque the Miracles wrought by Christ and his Apostles, and to dispute their Reality and Certainty.

When we read on what Account several of their Miracles were wrought, we know not whether is the greatest, the Assurance of the Priest, or the Credulity of the People. When we reflect upon the immoral (not to say impious) Lives of some of these Wonder-working Saints, we must look upon that Cause to be not only wicked but desperate, which hath recourse to such vile and infamous Expedients to support it.

There is no Necessity for Forgeries and Impositions to confirm the Truth of Revelation, since so many real Miracles were exhibited at different Times; not secretly, like the Papists, but publickly; not in a Cell, but the open Field; not in the Company of Friends,

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but in the Presence of Enemies: They were real, not pretended; performed on Persons, who were well known, and had a long Time laboured under the Disorder or Disease of which they were cured, not on such, whose Persons and Distempers were unknown, never heard of, and no where to be found.

The former Works are supernatural, the latter plainly appear to be the Contrivances of wicked Men: The Reality of the one neither Jew nor Infidel can disprove, but the latter no one can credit, except such who through Weakness, Fear, or Interest, are compelled so to do.

If there had been a Necessity for the Clergy in every Age to be endued with a Power of working Miracles, to prove the Truth of Christianity, they would have had it: But Unbelievers are to be convinced by Reason; they have the Miracles of Christ and his Apostles; if they admit them to be true, they want none other; if they reject them, others will be useless and insignificant. Such a Power was necessary at the first Publication of the Gospel, on Account of the Prejudices of Jews and Heathen against it: For as the Authority of the Jew's Religion was confirmed by Miracles, and Miracles were pretended to have been wrought in Confirmation of

of the Heathen, the Abolition of Judaism, and the Extirpation of Heathenism, could not have been effected, unless the first Publishers of the Christian Dispensation had exhibited such divine Testimony of its divine Authority and universal Obligation.

If the Doctrines of the Church of *Rome* are examined, they will appear to deprive us both of our Senses and Reason, in teaching Things impossible and absurd. Transubstantiation, or the actual Change of the Elements of Bread and Wine into the real Body and Blood of Christ, is a gross Imposition upon the Senses, and must expose that System of Religion to Contempt and Ridicule, which requires an Assent to it. Is not our Knowledge derived from the Senses? Are they not the Medium, which helpeth us to discover Truth from Falshood? Things which are the Objects of our Senses, must be judged by them. To say, as the Church of *Rome* confidently asserts, and Persons of that Communion are indispensably obliged implicitly to believe, that one Body is in the Lord's Supper substantially converted into another, though there is no visible Alteration made in the Elements themselves, is an Absurdity so glaring, that the Reasons urged, and the equivocal Distinctions made by the Papists will

never reconcile to the Senses and Understanding of Mankind. If no Credit is to be given to what we see, taste, and touch, but Things must be believed to be, what our Eyes clearly demonstrate they are not, and cannot be, then Christianity would be, what its Adversaries have termed it, a Religion founded on Ignorance and Credulity.

The Sacrament was instituted for the Commemoration of the Benefits received through the Merits of Christ. For this we have the Words of our Saviour: *This do, saith he, in Remembrance of me.* These Words, if they have any Meaning, suppose the Absence, not the bodily Presence of Christ. How could he otherwise be remembered by us?

The Priests have not only changed the Nature of the Elements in the Sacrament, but also the Method of Administration: They have debarred the Laity from the Cup, who are equally entitled with the Clergy to a Participation of both Kinds. The Benefit of Christ's Redemption all have a Right to, and will be, if they observe his Laws, Partakers of. To commemorate them, therefore, if the Command had not been general, all are obliged. There is no Authority from Scripture to justify this Exclusion; spiritual Pride gave Birth to it, and Priestcraft still upholds it.

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The Practice of our Church is agreeable to the Apostolical Usage, and the Custom of the Church in all Ages before the Appearance of Popery: The Laity equally partake with the Clergy. The Bread and Wine are not changed after Consecration, though they then cease to be, as before, common, because appropriated to a religious Use. The Bread broken represents Christ's Body crucified, the Wine poured out his Blood shed for us: His Sufferings, and the Benefits arising from them, we by eating and drinking, in a solemn and devout Manner, commemorate.

The great Power given to the Priests of absolving Persons from their Sins, relaxes the Obligation to the Practice of Virtue, takes from the Reverence due to Religion, and is an Encouragement to Vice. He that hath committed a Sin, goes to the Priest and confesses it; an Acknowledgment of his Crime procures him Absolution. Penance in some Cases may be required, but this is not so severe as to deter Men from the Gratification of their Desires. As their Churches are an Asylum for all Villains, Places of Refuge to which the most wicked and abandoned may flee to and be secure, so are their Priests for all Manner of Vice and Wickedness, which they both pardon and conceal: This is assum-

ing a Power, which belongs to God, who alone knows the Hearts of Men, who alone knows the proper Objects of Mercy and Forgiveness.

He that superstitiously adheres to the Doctrines of the Church, and acknowledges her Authority in the utmost Latitude, let his Crimes be ever so great or often repeated, he will always merit and obtain repeated Indulgence. If the Priest refuses to administer Absolution, a Legacy to some holy Order, or an handsome Present to the Confessor, will procure a full Pardon. If Absolutions are thus easily to be acquired, evil Habits need not be laid aside, 'till Sicknefs hath visited the Sinner, nor even then, if there is no Apprehension of Danger. If Death should on a sudden seize the Sinner, and deprive him of the Power of confessing and repenting, his Condition is not desperate, the Priest will find an Expedient to save him, if he leaves any Thing behind him, or hath any Friends able and willing to defray the necessary Expences for his Salvation. A temporary Punishment will be allotted him in Purgatory; at the Expiration of a few Years he will be happy: Such Power and Efficacy are attributed to Masses. What an Indulgence is here offered to Sinners! No wonder that Profelytes are so easily

easily gained. Men whose Actions have rendered their Salvation desperate, will eagerly embrace what affords them even the Appearance of Comfort and Consolation, much more that which, notwithstanding their Wickedness, promises them eternal Happiness.

If the Benefit of Purgatory is not allotted to every Sinner, every Sinner may look upon himself as entitled to it, since every one will naturally suppose his own Case to be the best, and others to have been more wicked than himself: However a Sum of Money, bestowed either to augment the Revenues of the Clergy, or for the Ease and Relief of the Poor, will procure this fiery Indulgence for any one. How vain, if we reflect, are the Hopes founded on it. Such they would appear to be to the deluded Persons, if they thought at all. It is the Merit or Demerit of our own Actions, the Observance or Neglect of the Precepts of Religion, that will finally determine us to a State of Happiness or Misery. All that others can do for us, will not avail ought in our Favour, procure us no Reward, nor exempt us from any Punishment. Every one is to be responsible for his own Actions; when Death hath put a Period to his Life, Repentance will be in vain, for in the Grave there is no Sorrow for Sin;

what he hath been, determines what he will be. Masses and Intercessions, however frequent and numerous, only betray the Folly of those, who offer them up, and the Weakness of those who rely upon them; tend to make Sinners presumptuous, and lessen the Obligation to the Practice of Virtue.

The End proposed by Christianity was, not only to cancel the Punishment due to Guilt, and to reinstate Men in the Favour of God, which they had forfeited, but also to abolish and extirpate the Superstition and Idolatry which had so long subsisted, by communicating more just and true Notions of the supreme Being, and establishing a pure and sensible Worship.

Hath not the Romanist in a great Measure frustrated this wise End of Providence? Have not Pagan Ceremonies and Customs been introduced into his religious Rites? Is not their Observance enforced under severe Penalties? Is not the Sense of Scripture perverted to give a Sanction to the idolatrous Worship? If divine Adoration paid by Papists to Saints and Angels is not, what is idolatrous Worship? Of these such trifling and foolish Exploits, such vile and infamous Acts are recorded, that it may surprise, how it came to pass, that Ashes so offensive should have been ever raked into,

into, much more honoured with a Consecration. The Worship of these new created Deities is profanely and impiously intermixed with that of the true God. The *Virgin Mary* hath near the Number of Prayers offered up to the supreme Being. These are Practices abominable and shameful; Excuses are not wanting, though none can be found sufficient, to palliate and soften them: They are condemned by Reason, and plainly contradictory to sacred Writ. God only is to be adored, he alone is to be worshipped by us: For he alone, as he is a Being absolutely and perfectly holy, deserves it.

These Saints are prayed to as Intercessors with the Almighty for the Pardon of their Sins. Doth not this Practice agree with the Heathen Notions of inferior and subordinate Deities, Men like to these Saints deified, who conveyed the Prayers of their respective Votaries to the supreme *Jupiter*, and interceded for them? But the Gospel, notwithstanding the Multitude of their Corruptions and Forgeries to make it countenance this infamous Practice, will never appear to teach more than one Mediator, the Man Christ Jesus, or more than one God, who governs, directs, and presides over human Affairs, the Lord and Creator of all Things.

Not

Not less culpable is the Church of *Rome* for the Idol she hath made, before which her Admirers continually prostrate themselves, the Crucifix. To say that they pray to the Image as such, from an Opinion that it could be of any Use or Service to them, would be absurd; but they look upon and pray to it as the Person, whom it is designed to represent: Which is expressly contradictory to the second Commandment. A Difficulty which they will never be able to get over.

Another Thing both unjust and unreasonable, though a refined Piece of Policy, being absolutely necessary to conceal the Frauds and Impostures of that Church, is the depriving her Votaries of the Use of the Bible. To her Doctrines they pay an implicit Obedience, not being permitted the Liberty of consulting the Scriptures, and by them judging of their Worth and Reasonableness. The Plea used to excuse this Conduct is very plausible; lest Men through Weakness, Ignorance, or Presumption should misunderstand, misrepresent, or abuse the Sense of Scripture to the Prejudice of their Salvation. But was the Scripture given only for the Use of the Learned? Are not all Men equally entitled to the Blessings mentioned in it? Is it not fit, that all should know how they are to be procured? And do

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we not accordingly find, that Matters respecting Faith and Manners, Things necessary to be believed and practised by us, are plain and intelligible to the meanest Capacity? Persons who read the Bible with Seriousness and Attention, will not be at a Loss to know their Duty, nor in any Danger of mistaking it. The true Cause of this Prohibition is a just Fear, lest their Errours should (as they certainly would) be detected, and their Impositions upon the Senses and Understanding of Mankind be exposed.

The Liturgy of the Church being in an unknown Tongue, is another gross Errour. Cast any Thing be more ridiculous and absurd, than for a Number of Persons to assemble together for devout and religious Purposes, and not know what they are praying for, and whom they are praying to, be unacquainted with the Object of Worship, and the Manner how he is worshipped? Is this assisting the weak and ignorant in their Devotions?

We may add to the Number of their Impositions, the Traditions of their Church: These are pretended to have been derived from the Apostles, supported by bold Assertions, without any solid Proof. To give them an Air of Authority, they are esteemed equal with the unerring Dictates of divine Wisdom,
and

and have the same Reverence paid to them. But the Innovations and Corruptions of the Church of *Rome*, which they establish and confirm, shew of what real Authority they are, and by whom invented; what Merit they justly claim, and what Reception they deserve. These Traditions are only as ancient as Popery; the Interest of which they were calculated to promote and serve.

In Opposition to these several Practices of that Church, our Church prescribes none other Absolution than the Scripture clearly warrants. This Absolution is only useful to those, whose Repentance is sincere, and whose future Conduct is agreeable to their Promise of Amendment. He that acts thus, merits Forgiveness; he that acts otherwise, hath no Claim to it.

In this present State the outward Appearances of Things determine Man's Judgment: For who can discover or penetrate into the secret and mazy Windings of the Heart? Persons may have a Shew of Virtue, though inwardly Strangers to it, may have the Reputation of Goodness, and be infamously wicked. Hence it is, that the Church of *England* doth not administer Absolution in the same arbitrary and authoritative Manner as the Church of *Rome*, whether the Person is worthy or unworthy

unworthy of receiving it. The Minister pronounces it in general Terms, leaving the Distinction and Ratification with God, who only knows what we really are, and who alone hath the Power of absolving us.

Our Church allows of no Place hereafter, wherein temporary Punishments are to be inflicted for an Expiation of Sins, no Masses to fill the Sinner with imaginary Hopes of procuring God's Favour by the Merits of another, or to dissipate his Fears of future Punishment: On the contrary she assures him, that his Happiness or Misery depends upon himself; that there is no intermediate State, and when Death hath put a Period to his Existence, there is no more Sorrowing for Sin, no Expiation to be made for it in the Grave.

Our Church hath no Traditions: The Scripture, as it is the only Guide that can be relied upon with Certainty and Safety, she makes her only Rule of Faith and Manners. Man's Words are frequently false, the Scripture never; Ignorance, Partiality, and Interest, frequently give Birth to the former, but whatever is contained in the latter is wholly designed for the Happiness of Man.

The Ceremonies of our Church are simple, and void of Superstition, nor is any Idolatry to be found in her Worship. No Saints, nor Angels,

gels, are the Objects of her Adoration, nor doth she make Use of any other Intercessor with Heaven, but the Person so appointed by the supreme Being, Jesus Christ. Her Liturgy is in the Vulgar Tongue, plain and clear, so as to enable every one to pray with the Spirit and Understanding. She allows every one the free Use of the Bible, and obliges no one to receive Doctrines contradictory to it.

Another dangerous Position, as well as uncharitable Opinion of the Church of *Rome*, is, that no Faith is to be kept with Hereticks; the Persons so termed are all without the Pale of her Communion: Such she looks upon to be in a State of Damnation. Compacts and Treaties are easily dissolved, when it is for the Interest and Advantage of the Powers in Subjection to that See. Oaths and Engagements are easily dispensed with at *Rome*, when either her own Grandeur, or that of the Powers in League with her, may be advanced by it.

If a Priest can absolve Subjects from their Allegiance; if Leagues or Treaties may be violated without just Reason or Offence, contrary to natural Equity and the approved Policy of Nations, what must we think of the Authority of that Religion, which is supposed to countenance and support these illegal Proceedings? But such are not the Principles nor the

the Doctrines of Christianity : It teaches Men to pay all just and due Obedience to their Governors, and to observe with Strictness all Oaths and Engagements : It gives no Power to Ecclesiasticks in Temporalities, and commands them to teach Men to live peaceably and orderly ; they being appointed to direct the Souls, not to govern the Bodies of Men.

What Love the Papists have for Mankind, hath appeared from the Pity and Compassion shewn to Hereticks, when in their Power : So extremely uncharitable are they, that not content with the Cruelties exercised upon their Bodies, they extend their Hatred and Malice, where all Hatred and Malice should end, beyond Life, and with their usual Arrogance and Presumption, pronounce them eternally damned. Such uncommon Acts of Inhumanity have been committed by them in all the known Parts of the World, as an Heathen could not have been concerned in, and a Savage would have blushed at.

How different from this the Conduct of our Church ; by which Allegiance to Princes and Governors is required both as a civil and religious Duty : As a civil Duty, being the Effect of human Policy, an Engagement mutually agreed upon and entered into between Subjects and their Sovereigns ; as a religious Duty,

Duty, Government being designed by Providence for the Comfort and Support, the Ease and Relief of the Wants and Necessities of human Nature, which could not be so well remedied and supplied in Retirement and Solitude, nor by putting Mankind upon a Level, without any regular Subordination to or Dependance on each other.

Man was designed for Society; he hath Powers and Affections, which in a reclus and retired Life would be useless and unnecessary. Is this Intention of Providence answered in the Church of *Rome*, by forbidding her Clergy to marry, and shutting up the other Sex in a Nunnery? Numberless Lusts and Villanies have been the Consequence of this unnatural Restraint and Confinement.

The Errours and Impositions mentioned have been of great Disservice to the Cause of Christianity, they have confirmed Unbelievers in their Prejudices, and been no small Obstruction to the Conversion of Jews, Mahometans, and Pagans.

The Jews, whose Religion is of the same Authority, though not of equal Perfection with the Christians, will not be easily wrought upon to renounce the Law, and embrace the Gospel, upon the Principles and Practices of the

the Church of *Rome*, for then the Purity and Simplicity of their Faith and Worship would be perverted and corrupted: Inasmuch as they would be obliged to pay divine Adoration to others, besides God, which is expressly forbidden in their Law. No Reasons urged will convince them, that a System which destroys the fundamental Principle of their own Religion, the Unity of the Deity, and encourages Idolatry, is of divine Authority, or can have any other Original than Fraud and Imposture: Not to mention the Persecutions they undergo in foreign Parts, for persisting in their Prejudices.

Attempts made for the Conversion of Mahomettans, are equally unpromising, and will prove as unsuccessful. No Sin is reckoned with them so abominable, as the Sin of Idolatry. How then can they be prevailed upon to offer divine Adoration to Saints, Martyrs, &c. Men of inferior Virtue and Goodness to their Worshipers? With what Contempt must they treat Christianity, which by the Papist is supposed to countenance it? What a mean Opinion must they entertain of their Sense and Understanding, who thus act? Whilst this Errour continues, their Conversion cannot be effected.

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Have

Have not Pagans also a strong Objection against Christianity, and a powerful Inducement not to change their Religion, upon the Principles of the *Roman* Church? With what Appearance of Reason, or with what Decency and Propriety, can the *Romanists* undertake to convert them from Idolatry, who are themselves an idolatrous People? They have brought over indeed many to the Christian Faith. But how was their Conversion wrought? By Reason and Argument? Rather by Cruelties and Severities.

TO CONCLUDE.

Many are the false Insinuations and infamous Aspersions of the Papists to vilify the Reformation: Such Treatment was natural, on Account of the Abridgment of the Power, and the great Diminution of the Revenues of the Papacy occasioned by it. Many have been the Schemes and Contrivances to render it ineffectual, and to bring us back again to the Times of Errour and Ignorance. Plots have been deeply laid for that Purpose, and Assassinations contrived; which were so extraordinarily disappointed and defeated, that we must acknowledge the Interposition of a divine Providence in our Favour. The Subver-

sion

sion both of our civil and religious Liberties hath been frequently attempted, and hitherto without Success. May such Attempts always prove abortive.

May the Almighty ever preserve both Church and State from *Popish* Priests and Princes, and may our Vices never give Cause for an Alteration in either.



I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 10th inst. in relation to the above named matter. I have the honor to inform you that the same has been forwarded to the proper authorities for their consideration. I am, Sir, very respectfully,
 Yours, very truly,
 J. M. Smith

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A
S E R M O N,

PREACHED AT

CHRIST-CHURCH

IN NEWGATE-STREET,

ON MONDAY, the 21st of SEPTEMBER,

BEFORE THE

RIGHT HONOURABLE the LORD MAYOR, &c.



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CHRIST CHURCH

ON MONDAY

IN NEWCASTLE STREET

ON MONDAY THE 10th OF SEPTEMBER

THE

REV. FATHER

WILL PREACH THE LORD'S DAY

ON

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OF

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AT

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On MONDAY, the 21st of SEPTEMBER,

BEFORE THE

RIGHT HONOURABLE the LORD MAYOR, &c.

GENESIS CHAP. XXV. VER. 14.

AND MISHMAH, AND DUMAH, AND MASSAH.

 HE Persons mentioned were the
Sons of *Ishmael*, who was the
Son of *Abraham*. The Occasion
of imposing these Names was, it
is probable, certain Calamities which had hap-
pened to the Father, either preceding, or at
the Time of their Birth.

It was a Custom that long prevailed in the first Ages of the World, to give Names to Children expressive of some special Incident that had occurred, or was at an appointed Time to happen. This Custom seems to have been laid aside after the Settlement of the *Jews* in the Land of *Canaan*.

The sacred History abounds with various Instances to illustrate and confirm the Truth of this Observation. It may not be impertinent to take Notice of a few.

Noah, the Son of *Lamech*, was so called, because in his Time the Curse, which God had pronounced upon the Earth for the Sin of *Adam*, was to be taken away: And so it was. A divine Grant was given to him, and to us his Posterity, of the free Use of living Creatures for common Food; which before the Deluge was prohibited. The Word *Noah*, signifies in the Original, Rest or Refreshment; and certainly it was no small Refreshment to have the Liberty of animal Food, since not only many were released by it from the painful Hardships and Fatigue of Husbandry, but those who should be employed would be enabled with more Ease, as having more Strength, to follow it. This was the Reason assigned by *Lamech* for so naming him; and he called him *Noah*, "saying,
"this

“ this same shall comfort us concerning our
“ Work, and Toil of our Hands, because of
“ the Ground which the Lord hath cursed.”

The Sons of *Jacob* also received their Names from some particular Circumstances that preceded, or occurred at their Birth, or were to befall their Posterity.

The same Observation is true of the Sons of *Joseph*, “ *Ephraim*, and *Manasseh*.” The latter signifies *Forgetfulness*, by which he acknowledged the divine Favour towards him, in having made him forget his Afflictions and Sorrows. The former signifies *Fruitfulness*, by which he acknowledged the divine Goodness towards him, in delivering him from extreme Poverty and Distress, and raising him to the most considerable Post in the Kingdom of *Ægypt*.

This Conduct of Providence intimates to us, that Virtue, though oppressed, will not fail in due Time of its proper Reward. It should teach us also to bear Afflictions, however sharp and severe, with a pious Resignation to the Will of the Almighty; not despairing of his Mercy, not censuring his Justice, not accusing his Goodness for permitting them, since they may become the Instruments of Happiness to us.

The

The Instances mentioned are sufficient to justify the Explanation to be given of the Persons Names recorded in the Text. The Propriety and Significancy of them will appear from certain Occurrences in the Life of *Isbmael*.

The Meaning of these Names, *Mishmab*, *Dumah*, *Massab*, is, Obedience, Resignation, Patience.

Isbmael, upon the Birth of *Isaac*, was compelled with an helpless and unfortunate Mother, at the Age of fourteen, to seek a Living in an unknown and desert Country. They were weak and defenceless, exposed to the disagreeable and painful Sensations of Hunger and Thirst, and fearful of becoming a Prey to the wild Beasts. To return back they dared not. Famine was before them, and Terror all around them. So great was their Distress, that had it not been for a miraculous Interposition, they must have perished in inexpressible Agony and Torture. At the last he gained a Settlement, and with as many Difficulties maintained himself in, as acquired it.

From these Occurrences we perceive the Propriety and Significancy of these Names.

By his Son *Mishmab* is signified his Readiness in obeying the divine Injunction, when
ordered

ordered to leave both his Father and his Country.

By his Son *Dumab* is signified his Resignation to the Will of Providence, without complaining or murmuring at the Misfortunes he had endured, or which afterwards might happen to him.

By his Son *Maffab* is signified his Reliance upon the Goodness of God to remove his Afflictions.

The Names of the Persons thus explained will furnish some useful Lessons of Instruction, how to conduct ourselves when under the same, or the like disagreeable Circumstances; and also point out the Means of alleviating any Evils or Calamities that may befall us.

F I R S T.

By *Ishmael's* Obedience, signified in his Son *Mishmah*, we should learn to be content in whatever State of Life we are placed; not envying others on Account of the Riches they enjoy, nor repining because we have not more than Providence hath thought fit for us to have, or because we are not so happy, as others seem to be.

Contentment

Contentment is the Virtue that gives a Relish to all the Joys, and is a principal Remedy for all the Evils of Life. Without it Pleasure is insipid, and the Want of it renders the most trifling Misfortune insupportable. No State of Life can be comfortable, where that is not, and none truly miserable, where it is.

Notwithstanding, there is but little Content in the World. Most Men appear dissatisfied with their Condition. Every one looks upon another to be more happy than himself. O! if he could be as he is, he should be perfectly easy. Suppose his Wish to be gratified. Is he satisfied? Doth Desire cease? Hath he met with the Happiness he imagined? He is as uneasy as before. He again wants his Condition to be altered.

It is a ridiculous and unpardonable Weakness to consider others as happy, and not endeavour to make ourselves so; which we may certainly be, whatever our Situation in Life is. I am poor, and another is rich. He can purchase every Thing that he wants. I can do the same, so long as I want nothing more than I can purchase. I limit my Desires to my Circumstances. Can he do more? I might indeed partake of many more Gratifications, if I had his Wealth, yet not be more
happy

happy than I am at present. A large Fortune will procure Superfluities, but the Wants of Nature are to be satisfied, and the Necessaries of Life procured without it.

I cannot make the Figure which others do. What then? Cannot I be virtuous and good? Is not this Happiness? The Pomp and Splendour of the Wealthy and the Great are not so satisfactory to the Possessors, as pleasing to the Spectators. The outward Appearance is no true Index to the Mind. Persons are not always what they seem to be. He, whom the World reckons an happy Man, might be found upon Inquiry to be miserable, if not wretched.

Rest content therefore in your Station. Providence by placing you in it, judges it to be the best for you. A different Station might have been worse. The Inconveniencies, Cares, and Troubles which might follow upon the Change, are unknown to you. Be thankful to God for what you are, and what he hath given you enjoy. He hath left no Man destitute of Means necessary to acquire a proper Subsistence. Every one, hath Abilities requisite to procure a Sufficiency of the Things of this Life, according to their different Situations in it. If any Man is miserable,
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it is either through his Follies, or a Misapplication and Abuse of his Wealth and Power, or through Discontent in coveting Things above him, and aiming at a Station for which he was not designed. Conceit and Vanity more or less infect the Minds of all Men. We are apt to entertain an high Opinion of our Merit, and think that we deserve much more than we have; looking upon ourselves as unhappy, because we have it not, and being ungrateful for what we have.

We should endeavour to make ourselves happy with what we have, be it little, or much. We were not all born to be rich and great. And for the general Uses made of Riches and Power, acquired or inherited, it is well that but few possess and enjoy them. Why should we think ourselves to be miserable, because we have not these Things? Why uneasy at the Want of them? Why should we esteem those who have them to be on that Account more happy than we? Are they Strangers to Sorrow, and unacquainted with Grief? Do they not continually suffer something disagreeable from Envy and Jealousy? He that hath the Mastery over his Appetites and Passions, is greater than a Prince. He that is content, will not complain for the Want of Riches. He that cannot make himself

self happy in a mean Estate, will never be truly happy in any; for he founds his Happiness on Things external, which cannot give it, as they are of uncertain and precarious Possession.

Happiness or Misery is solely lodged within ourselves: It depends upon our Innocence or Guilt. The most prosperous State can yield no true Comfort to him, whose Soul is polluted with Sin. All the Delights and Pleasures he partakes of, will not be an equivalent for, nor remove that Uneasiness he feels at Heart. He cannot be easy under the Conviction of his Crimes, and a Sense of the terrible Punishment to which they expose him hereafter. Remember then to keep Innocency, and take heed to perform the Thing that is right: For that alone will make any Condition comfortable, that alone can bring you Peace at the last.

SECONDLY,

By *Ishmael's* Resignation to the Will of Providence, signified in his Son *Dumah*, we should learn to be resigned when Afflictions and Troubles have come upon us. These, however great and severe, should not move us to charge divine Providence with Injustice in permitting

permitting them, nor drive us to despair of its Assistance in removing them. We should not be proud and exulting in Prosperity, nor dejected or clamorous in the Days of Adversity; that we might not be led away by our Lusts to transgress the Commandments of God, nor to impeach his Goodness.

Troubles and Afflictions are not well pleasing to human Nature. But why should we be impatient under them? Do we suffer alone? Is not all Mankind in some, if not in the same Degree, Sufferers with us? Who is there without his Sorrows? Who is the fortunate Man that hath met with no Misfortune, felt no Uneasiness, suffered no Disappointment? These Things happen indiscriminately to the Rich and the Poor, the Little and the Great. Why should we be exempt? Is our Merit greater, or are we better than others?

But our Sufferings are acute and severe. If we compare them with others, we shall cease from complaining. The Miseries which others feel are slightly noticed by us. If we rightly considered them, we should see Reason to bless and praise God for his Goodness towards us, in having so lightly afflicted us. If we turned our Eye inwardly, and examined our past Conduct, we should find ourselves to
have

have been guilty of so many Follies, that instead of murmuring at the Afflictions we may labour under, we shall be thankful to Almighty God for not inflicting more.

Though we may not deserve ill from the Hands of Men, who will say that he hath deserved well at the Hands of God? Where is the righteous Man who sinneth not; whose Hands have not dealt with Wickedness; whose Tongue hath uttered no Deceit; whose Heart hath conceived no Ill; whose Conscience is undefiled with Guilt? Where dwells the spotless Innocent, whose Virtue hath withstood the alluring Wiles of Vice; whom no Temptation hath overcome, no Sin beguiled? Alas! All have sinned, all have fallen short of their Duty to God. O Man! what art thou? A weak and sinful Creature. Boast not of thy Merit, nor talk of thy Excellencies, thou who art daily offending, whose Transgressions are many, who cannot cease from Sin. If such a one thou art, how canst thou murmur and complain in the Time of Affliction and Distress? However base thy Fellow-Creatures may be to thee, Providence is not unjust. If thou hadst thy just Deserts, thou mightest be much more unhappy than thou art. And if thou lookest around, thou wilt find many more miserable than thyself.

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If our Wants are many, and Remedies few ; if we know not how to remove the one, or to procure the other, is it not more noble to submit, and to be superior to the Accidents of Life, than to be depressed in Spirit, or meanly and basely to seek Relief from Dishonesty ? This adds to Affliction Guilt, consequently increases our Uneasiness, and renders what before was tolerable, insupportable. A Man in Distress, disdaining to purchase his Ease at the Expence of his Innocence, or for the Gratification of any Desire to wound his Conscience with Guilt, gives a Dignity to Human Nature, is a Conduct that merits the highest Commendation, a Sight most worthy of God to behold.

Before our Virtue hath been put to the Test, it is little more than nominal. The Observance of our Duty, when there is no Solicitation to transgress it, no Temptation to draw us aside, though it is entitled to, doth not greatly merit a Reward. Misfortunes are Trials of our Integrity, they prove the Sincerity of our Affection for Religion. When in Affliction and Distress it is our Duty not to fall from, but to persevere in our Obedience ; not seeking a Remedy from a Violation of the Laws of God, nor throwing out hard and unseemly Speeches against his Providence.

It

It is not agreeable to Human Nature to be in Pain. But why should we accuse Heaven? Why charge it upon the Almighty? God would not the Misery of any of the Things he hath made, much more of his favourite Creature Man; whose Troubles and Disorders are more generally to be attributed to his Follies and Vices, than to the common Accidents of Life. Little Reason therefore hath he for Complaint. If otherwise, it is his Duty patiently to submit.

Patience indeed is a Virtue much celebrated, and greatly recommended, but rarely practised. To talk of, and to be in Affliction, it must be acknowledged, are two very different Things. It is much easier in this Case to shew, than to follow what is right. We are apt when in Affliction, and it is natural as well as common so to do, to catch at any Thing which may seemingly afford us Ease, and frequently we embrace such Means, which do not lessen, but heighten our Sorrows. But to be hasty is not good, and to be tardy is equally pernicious. To be patient, not rashly grasping at imaginary Comforts, nor so weak as to neglect real ones, is the happy Medium that will render a Life of Care and Trouble tolerable.

However, if our Afflictions are grievous and severe, when we consider the Shortness of human Life, we may with Patience bear them. They can continue only for a few Years. The End of Life is daily approaching. Death will e'er long visit us, and put a Period to all our Sorrows.

THIRDLY,

By *Ismael's* Patience, signified in his Son *Massab*, we should learn, when in Afflictions, to rely upon the Goodness of God to remove them.

What Comfort and Satisfaction must we receive upon Reflection in the Midst of Trouble and Distress, that we are under the peculiar Care of so powerful a Being as God, who knows what we feel, pities, and will relieve us, if we endeavour by an holy and virtuous Life to merit his Favour. To such he will always shew himself a Friend, a Father, a God. A Friend, in assisting them by his Wisdom; a Father, in providing them with Things necessary and convenient; a God, in protecting them from the Misfortunes and Calamities of Life.

When the World frowns upon you, when Friends slight or neglect you, when Malice or the Tongue of Calumny and Detraction shoot their envenomed Arrows against you, or Sick-
ness

ness hath visited you, look upwards to Heaven, let your Requests be made known to God, whose Ears are always open to the Prayers of his Servants, who is always ready to receive, and grant their humble Petitions. From him no Suppliant ever departed disappointed or dissatisfied.

What a God is this! How good and gracious! Upon whom can you better depend for Relief in the Time of Adversity? Murmur not, nor repine; with Patience wait a Change. Deserve his Goodness, and you will obtain it. He will not leave, nor forsake you in your Distress.

However severe your Afflictions may be, never be driven to doubt, or despair of God's Goodness. Many have met with a full Accomplishment of their Desires, when no Hope remained, contrary to human Probability, and by Means the most unpromising. Observe his Commandments, and you may be assured of the same Mercy. "He that putteth his Trust in the most High shall never miscarry. It is better to trust in the Lord than to put any Confidence in Princes, or in any of the Sons of Men." He never deserts, nor forsakes those, who rely upon him, but Man frequently does.

If

If to rely upon Providence is thought to be Quixotism; is it less absurd to depend upon Man, whose Heart is full of Deceit and Hypocrisy, bigotted to Prejudice, the Slave of Interest, the Dupe to his own Passions? To acquire his Favour, what Meanness must be submitted to; and when acquired, what Flattery must be used to retain it. And all this (O unbecoming and unworthy of a reasonable and immortal Being!) for a little sordid Gain, the scanty Subsistence of a Day: For Life is no more. He that takes Man, and not God for his Strength, is not only to be condemned, but too often severely smarts for his Folly.

What Security can Greatness yield? What Safety, Wealth? What permanent Happiness either to the Possessor? How often have Poverty and Disgrace succeeded both, and the Favourite of Fortune and the Sovereign been sacrificed through the Inconstancy and Weakness of the Prince, to still the Madness of the People. The same Calamity indeed may happen to the good, as well as to the wicked Man: But conscious Worth will support the former, and conscious Guilt add to the Miseries of the latter. It must be unspeakable Comfort when in Affliction to say, " Though I suffer, I am
" innocent; though in Pain, it is not the Ef-
fect

“fect of my Folly, and I have Confidence in
“God that he will deliver me out of all my
“Sorrows.” Far better is it, than when Anguish and Woe have come upon us, to say,
“All this I have deserved, my Punishment is
“just, my Sins have brought it upon me.”

The APPLICATION.

Having explained the Text, and recommended the Observance of the Duties deducible from it, we come now to the Application suitable to the present Meeting.

Ismael, if not an Orphan, was a deserted, exposed, and destitute Child. His Mother, if not a Widow, had no Husband to comfort her, was forsaken, and incapable of supporting either herself, or her offspring. Both were proper Objects of Providence, being innocent and helpless; by whom, when perishing for Thirst, they were miraculously preserved through the Interposition of an Angel.

So easy and natural is the Transition, that you must anticipate the Application. Your Eyes behold, if not the Sons of Hagar, the Brethren of *Ismael*, in respect of their Poverty and Want. In you their afflicted and distressed Parents find, if not a guardian Angel to secure them from Distress and Danger,
the

the Means of preventing that Misery and Wretchedness, which would be the inevitable Consequence of Desertion. You cause the Widow to forget her Sorrows, and the Orphan his Loss. The Death of his Parent is no longer considered a Misfortune, when received under your Protection. Without this Asylum to resort to, how many Children, like to *Ismael* under the Shrubs, would have laid in the Streets perishing: How, like to *Hagar*, would their Mothers have been comfortless, and filled our Ears with bitter Cries and Lamentations for the Distresses of their helpless and unfortunate Offspring.

The different Necessities of these Children, the Goodness of their several Benefactors, and the Care of you their Patrons, would require a masterly Hand to display. The Extensiveness and Usefulness of the Plan are not to be set forth in such confined Discourses. No greater Pleasure could be received than in a Work of this Kind by one, who gratefully acknowledges his many Obligations to this Charity. It is worthy of Observation, that notwithstanding the vast Multitude of Children which have been educated in it, very few have been found undeserving, but many have made such Proficiency in every Art and Profession, as to have

have proved of eminent and singular Benefit and Service to Society, and the rest have been sober, honest, and useful Members thereof.

This, if the Dead know any Thing, must be a Satisfaction to their deceased Benefactors, and must also be both an Incitement and a Pleasure to you their Patrons to imitate the good Example: That the Foundation so successfully laid by the Royal Edward, may be ever flourishing and increasing; who, though a Prince, remembered that he was a Man, and condescended to the common Offices of Humanity; who from the utmost Height of worldly Pomp and Grandeur, looked down with a tender and compassionate Heart on those that were broken with Misfortunes, and overwhelmed with Sorrows; and displayed the just Character of a great Prince, by being a Friend to the meanest of his Subjects.

Not to mention the other Hospitals, the Commemoration of whose Founders and Benefactors makes Part of this Day's Solemnity, would be an unpardonable Omission, though a Digression. Too much cannot be said in Commendation of their Usefulness; yet Brevity is here necessary, that I might not antici-

pate the Pleasure you will receive in another Place*.

Let it suffice to say, that in them every Thing, which Art, Skill, and Medicine can do, with gentle and courteous Usage, is applied to administer Ease and Relief to the various Disorders and Diseases incident to the Human Body. Where the insane by the Assistance of proper Diet and Physick recover from their Phrenzy, and are restored to their former Soundness of Mind. Where the loose and disorderly, by Discipline judiciously applied and painful Drudgery, are reclaimed, and taught to set a proper Value upon that honest Labour, which they out of Idleness or Wickedness relinquished. These are Charities, which do Honour to us as a People, and reflect a Lustre upon the Reformation: which by rooting up Superstition, caused Charity to flow in its proper Channel. These are Charities not calculated, like to those of *Romish* Superstition, for Pride, Ostentation, and the Manifestation of false Zeal, in the Foundation of religious Houses, the grand Nurseries of Vice, Ignorance, and Indolence; but for real and substantial Use, as Places of Refuge for

* In the Grammar School, where two Orations were spoken by the two senior Scholars in Commemoration of the Founders and Benefactors of the several Hospitals.

the afflicted, distressed, and diseased, and the Establishment of pure Religion and useful Learning.

These Charities are real and illustrious Ornaments to this City; eminent amongst the Nations for its extensive Trade and Commerce, but more truly and justly so for the pious Distribution of their Fruits to the Poor and Needy.

As an Inducement to you, or others, to continue the Support and Maintainance of these Royal Foundations, which have greatly suffered in their Revenues from various Causes, not unknown to this Audience, permit me to conclude with saying, " That no Charities
" can equal these, either for the Extensiveness
" of the Plan, the Number of Objects continually relieved and supported, the Decency,
" Order, and Oeconomy with which they are
" conducted, the great Care and Diligence
" used in the Appointment of discreet, proper, and able Persons to have the Direction
" and Management thereof, and the great
" Tenderness and Humanity exercised by their
" respective Officers."

Do you then, my Brethren, according to the Ability which God hath given to you, having first sufficiently provided for your Families,

milies, or Relations, if such are in Necessity, bestow the Remainder of your Wealth and Substance in such Manner, and in such Proportion, as the particular Wants and Exigences of the several Foundations may require.

To the Blessed Trinity be given Praise, and Adoration, now and ever : Amen.



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